Susan Stanwood
February, 1958

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LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL

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LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL

A Story of the Buried Life

BY

THOMAS WOLFE

> *"At one time the earth was probably a white-hot sphere like the sun."*
>
> —TARR AND MCMURRY

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TO

A. B.

"Then, as all my soules bee,
Emparadis'd in you, (in whom alone
I understand, and grow and see,)
The rafters of my body, bone
Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew and Veine,
Which tile this house, will come againe."

TO THE READER

This is a first book, and in it the author has written of experience which is now far and lost, but which was once part of the fabric of his life. If any reader, therefore, should say that the book is "autobiographical" the writer has no answer for him: it seems to him that all serious work in fiction is autobiographical—that, for instance, a more autobiographical work than "Gulliver's Travels" cannot easily be imagined.

This note, however, is addressed principally to those persons whom the writer may have known in the period covered by these pages. To these persons, he would say what he believes they understand already: that this book was written in innocence and nakedness of spirit, and that the writer's main concern was to give fulness, life, and intensity to the actions and people in the book he was creating. Now that it is to be published, he would insist that this book is a fiction, and that he meditated no man's portrait here.

But we are the sum of all the moments of our lives—all that is ours is in them: we cannot escape or conceal it. If the writer has used the clay of life to make his book, he has only used what all men must, what none can keep from using. Fiction is not fact, but fiction is fact selected and understood, fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose. Dr. Johnson remarked that a man would turn over half a library to make a single book: in the same way, a novelist may turn over half the people in a town to make a single figure in his novel. This is not the whole method but the writer believes it illustrates the whole method in a book that is written from a middle distance and is without rancour or bitter intention.

PART I

. . . a stone, a leaf, an unfound door; of a stone, a leaf, a door. And of all the forgotten faces.

Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother's face; from the prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth.

Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father's heart? Which of us has not remained forever prison-pent? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?

O waste of loss, in the hot mazes, lost, among bright stars on this most weary unbright cinder, lost! Remembering speechlessly we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, an unfound door. Where? When?

O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.

LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL!

I

A DESTINY that leads the English to the Dutch is strange enough; but one that leads from Epsom into Pennsylvania, and thence into the hills that shut in Altamont over the proud coral cry of the cock, and the soft stone smile of an angel, is touched by that dark miracle of chance which makes new magic in a dusty world.

Each of us is all the sums he has not counted: subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas.

The seed of our destruction will blossom in the desert, the alexin of our cure grows by a mountain rock, and our lives are haunted by a Georgia slattern, because a London cutpurse went unhung. Each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years. The minute-winning days, like flies, buzz home to death, and every moment is a window on all time.

This is a moment:

An Englishman named Gilbert Gaunt, which he later changed to Gant (a concession probably to Yankee phonetics), having come to Baltimore from Bristol in 1837 on a sailing vessel, soon let the profits of a public house which he had purchased roll down his improvident gullet. He wandered westward into Pennsylvania, eking out a dangerous living by matching fighting cocks against the champions of country barnyards, and often escaping after a night spent in a village jail, with his champion dead on the field of battle, without the clink of a coin in his pocket, and sometimes with the print of a farmer's big knuckles on his reckless face. But he always escaped, and coming at length among the Dutch at harvest time he was so touched by the plenty of their land that he cast out his anchors there. Within a year he married a rugged young widow with a tidy farm who like all the other Dutch had been charmed by his air of travel, and his grandiose speech, particularly when he did Hamlet in the manner of the great Edmund Kean. Every one said he should have been an actor.

The Englishman begot children—a daughter and four sons—lived easily and carelessly, and bore patiently the weight of his wife's harsh but honest tongue. The years passed, his bright somewhat staring eyes grew dull and bagged, the tall Englishman walked with a gouty shuffle: one morning when she came to nag him out of sleep she found him dead of an apoplexy. He left five children, a mortgage and—in his strange dark eyes which now stared bright and open—something that had not died: a passionate and obscure hunger for voyages.

So, with this legacy, we leave this Englishman and are concerned hereafter with the heir to whom he bequeathed it, his second son, a boy named Oliver. How this boy stood by the roadside near his mother's farm, and saw the dusty Rebels march past on their way to Gettysburg, how his cold eyes darkened when he heard the great name of Virginia, and how the year the war had ended, when he was still fifteen, he had walked along a street in Baltimore, and seen within a little shop smooth granite slabs of death, carved lambs and cherubim, and an angel poised upon cold phthisic feet, with a smile of soft stone idiocy—this is a longer tale. But I know that his cold and shallow eyes had darkened with the obscure and passionate hunger that had lived in a dead man's eyes, and that had led from Fenchurch Street past Philadelphia. As the boy looked at the big angel with the carved stipe of lilystalk, a cold and nameless excitement possessed him. The long fingers of his big hands closed. He felt that he wanted, more than anything in the world, to carve delicately with a chisel. He wanted to wreak something dark and unspeakable in him into cold stone. He wanted to carve an angel's head.

Oliver entered the shop and asked a big bearded man with a wooden mallet for a job. He became the stone cutter's apprentice. He worked in that dusty yard five years. He became a stone cutter. When his apprenticeship was over he had become a man.

He never found it. He never learned to carve an angel's head. The dove. the lamb, the smooth joined marble hands of death, and letters fair and fine—but not the angel. And of all the years of waste and loss—the riotous years in Baltimore, of work and savage drunkenness, and the theatre of Booth and Salvini, which had a disastrous effect upon the stone cutter, who memorized each accent of the noble rant, and strode muttering through the streets, with rapid gestures of the enormous talking hands—these are blind steps and gropings of our exile, the painting of our hunger as, remembering speechlessly, we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, a door. Where? When?

He never found it, and he reeled down across the continent into the Reconstruction South—a strange wild form of six feet four with cold uneasy eyes, a great blade of nose, and a rolling tide of rhetoric, a preposterous and comic invective, as formalized as classical epithet, which he used seriously, but with a faint uneasy grin around the corners of his thin wailing mouth.

He set up business in Sydney, the little capital city of one of the middle Southern states, lived soberly and industriously under the attentive eye of a folk still raw with defeat and hostility, and finally, his good name founded and admission won, he married a gaunt tubercular spinstress, ten years his elder, but with a nest egg and an unshakable will to matrimony. Within eighteen months he was a howling maniac again, his little business went smash while his foot stayed on the polished rail, and Cynthia, his wife—whose life, the natives said, he had not helped to prolong—died suddenly one night after a hemorrhage.

So, all was gone again—Cynthia, the shop, the hard-bought praise of soberness, the angel's head—he walked through the streets at dark, yelling his pentameter curse at Rebel ways, and all their indolence; but sick with fear and loss and penitence, he wilted under the town's reproving stare, becoming convinced, as the flesh wasted on his own gaunt frame, that Cynthia's scourge was doing vengeance now on him.

He was only past thirty, but he looked much older. His face was yellow and sunken; the waxen blade of his nose looked like a beak. He had long brown mustaches that hung straight down mournfully.

His tremendous bouts of drinking had wrecked his health.

He was thin as a rail and had a cough. He thought of Cynthia now, in the lonely and hostile town, and he became afraid. He thought he had tuberculosis and that he was going to die.

So, alone and lost again, having found neither order nor establishment in the world, and with the earth cut away from his feet, Oliver resumed his aimless drift along the continent. He turned westward toward the great fortress of the hills, knowing that behind them his evil fame would not be known, and hoping that he might find in them isolation, a new life, and recovered health.

The eyes of the gaunt spectre darkened again, as they had in his youth.

All day, under a wet gray sky of October, Oliver rode westward across the mighty state. As he stared mournfully out the window at the great raw land so sparsely tilled by the futile and occasional little farms, which seemed to have made only little grubbing patches in the wilderness, his heart went cold and leaden in him. He thought of the great barns of Pennsylvania, the ripe bending of golden grain, the plenty, the order, the clean thrift of the people. And he thought of how he had set out to get order and position for himself, and of the rioting confusion of his life, the blot and blur of years, and the red waste of his youth.

By God! he thought. I'm getting old! Why here?

The grisly parade of the spectre years trooped through his brain. Suddenly, he saw that his life had been channelled by a series of accidents: a mad Rebel singing of Armageddon, the sound of a bugle on the road, the mule-hoofs of the army, the silly white face of an angel in a dusty shop, a slut's pert wiggle of her hams as she passed by. He had reeled out of warmth and plenty into this barren land: as he stared out the window and saw the fallow unworked earth, the great raw lift of the Piedmont, the muddy red clay roads, and the slattern people gaping at the stations—a lean farmer gangling above his reins, a dawdling negro, a gap-toothed yokel, a hard sallow woman with a grimy baby—the strangeness of destiny stabbed him with fear. How came he here from the clean Dutch thrift of his youth into this vast lost earth of rickets?

The train rattled on over the reeking earth. Rain fell steadily. A brakeman came draftily into the dirty plush coach and emptied a scuttle of coal into the big stove at the end. High empty laughter shook a group of yokels sprawled on two turned seats. The bell tolled mournfully above the clacking wheels. There was a droning interminable wait at a junction-town near the foot-hills. Then the train moved on again across the vast rolling earth.

Dusk came. The huge bulk of the hills was foggily emergent. Small smoky lights went up in the hillside shacks. The train crawled dizzily across high trestles spanning ghostly hawsers of water. Far up, far down, plumed with wisps of smoke, toy cabins stuck to bank and gulch and hillside. The train toiled sinuously up among gouged red cuts with slow labor. As darkness came, Oliver descended at the little town of Old Stockade where the rails ended. The last great wall of the hills lay stark above him. As he left the dreary little station and stared into the greasy lamplight of a country store, Oliver felt that he was crawling, like a great beast, into the circle of those enormous hills to die.

The next morning he resumed his journey by coach. His destination was the little town of Altamont, twenty-four miles away beyond the rim of the great outer wall of the hills. As the horses strained slowly up the mountain road Oliver's spirit lifted a little. It was a gray-golden day in late October, bright and windy. There was a sharp bite and sparkle in the mountain air: the range soared above him, close, immense, clean, and barren. The trees rose gaunt and stark: they were almost leafless. The sky was full of windy white rags of cloud; a thick blade of mist washed slowly around the rampart of a mountain.

Below him a mountain stream foamed down its rocky bed, and he could see little dots of men laying the track that would coil across the hill toward Altamont. Then the sweating team lipped the gulch of the mountain, and, among soaring and lordly ranges that melted away in purple mist, they began the slow descent toward the high plateau on which the town of Altamont was built.

In the haunting eternity of these mountains. rimmed in their enormous cup, he found sprawled out on its hundred hills and hollows a town of four thousand people.

There were new lands. His heart lifted.

This town of Altamont had been settled soon after the Revolutionary war. It had been a convenient stopping-off place for cattle-drovers and farmers in their swing eastward from Tennessee into South Carolina. And, for several decades before the Civil war, it had enjoyed the summer patronage of fashionable people from Charleston and the plantations of the hot South. When Oliver first came to it it had begun to get some reputation not only as a summer resort, but as a sanitarium for tuberculars. Several rich men from the North had established hunting lodges in the hills, and one of them had bought huge areas of mountain land and, with an army of imported architects, carpenters and masons, was planning the greatest country estate in America —something in limestone, with pitched slate roofs, and one hundred and eighty-three rooms. It was modelled on the chateau at Blois. There was also a vast new hotel, a sumptuous wooden barn, rambling comfortably upon the summit of a commanding hill.

But most of the population was still native, recruited from the hill and country people in the surrounding districts. They were Scotch-Irish mountaineers, rugged, provincial, intelligent, and industrious.

Oliver had about twelve hundred dollars saved from the wreckage of Cynthia's estate. During the winter he rented a little shack at one edge of the town's public square, acquired a small stock of marbles, and set up business. But he had little to do at first save to think of the prospect of his death. During the bitter and lonely winter, while he thought he was dying, the gaunt scarecrow Yankee that flapped muttering through the streets became an object of familiar gossip to the townspeople. All the people at his boarding-house knew that at night he walked his room with great caged strides, and that a long low moan that seemed wrung from his bowels quivered incessantly on his thin lips. But he spoke to no one about it.

And then the marvellous hill Spring came, green-golden, with brief spurting winds, the magic and fragrance of the blossoms, warm gusts of balsam. The great wound in Oliver began to heal. His voice was heard in the land once more, there were purple flashes of the old rhetoric, the ghost of the old eagerness.

One day in April, as with fresh awakened senses, he stood before his shop, watching the flurry of life in the square, Oliver heard behind him the voice of a man who was passing. And that voice, flat, drawling, complacent, touched with sudden light a picture that had lain dead in him for twenty years.

"Hit's a comin'! Accordin' to my figgers hit's due June 11, 1886."

Oliver turned and saw retreating the burly persuasive figure of the prophet he had last seen vanishing down the dusty road that led to Gettysburg and Armageddon.

"Who is that?" he asked a man.

The man looked and grinned.

"That's Bacchus Pentland," he said. "He's quite a character. There are a lot of his folks around here."

Oliver wet his great thumb briefly. Then, with a thin grin, he said:

"Has Armageddon come yet?"

"He's expecting it any day now," said the man.

Then Oliver met Eliza. He lay one afternoon in Spring upon the smooth leather sofa of his little office, listening to the bright piping noises in the Square. A restoring peace brooded over his great extended body. He thought of the loamy black earth with its sudden young light of flowers, of the beaded chill of beer, and of the plumtree's dropping blossoms. Then he heard the brisk heel-taps of a woman coming down among the marbles, and he got hastily to his feet. He was drawing on his well brushed coat of heavy black just as she entered.

"I tell you what," said Eliza, pursing her lips in reproachful banter, "I wish I was a man and had nothing to do but lie around all day on a good easy sofa."

"Good afternoon, madam," said Oliver with a flourishing bow. "Yes," he said, as a faint sly grin bent the corners of his thin mouth, "I reckon you've caught me taking my constitutional. As a matter of fact I very rarely lie down in the daytime, but I've been in bad health for the last year now, and I'm not able to do the work I used to."

He was silent a moment; his face drooped in an expression of hangdog dejection. "Ah, Lord! I don't know what's to become of me!"

"Pshaw!" said Eliza briskly and contemptuously. "There's nothing wrong with you in my opinion. You're a big strapping fellow, in the prime of life. Half of it's only imagination. Most of the time we think we're sick it's all in the mind. I remember three years ago I was teaching school in Hominy Township when I was taken down with pneumonia. Nobody ever expected to see me come out of it alive but I got through it somehow; I well remember one day I was sitting down—as the fellow says, I reckon I was convalescin'; the reason I remember is Old Doctor Fletcher had just been and when he went out I saw him shake his head at my cousin Sally. 'Why Eliza, what on earth,' she said, just as soon as he had gone, 'he tells me you're spitting up blood every time you cough; you've got consumption as sure as you live.' 'Pshaw,' I said. I remember I laughed just as big as you please, determined to make a big joke of it all; I just thought to myself, I'm not going to give into it, I'll fool them all yet; 'I don't believe a word of it' (I said)," she nodded her head smartly at him, and pursed her lips, " 'and besides, Sally' (I said) 'we've all got to go some time, and there's no use worrying about what's going to happen. It may come to-morrow, or it may come later, but it's bound to come to all in the end.' "

"Ah Lord!" said Oliver, shaking his head sadly. "You hit the nail on the head that time. A truer word was never spoken."

Merciful God! he thought, with an anguished inner grin. How long is this to keep up? But she's a pippin as sure as you're born. He looked appreciatively at her trim erect figure, noting her milky white skin, her black-brown eyes, with their quaint child's stare, and her jet black hair drawn back tightly from her high white forehead. She had a curious trick of pursing her lips reflectively before she spoke; she liked to take her time, and came to the point after interminable divagations down all the lane-ends of memory and overtone, feasting upon the golden pageant of all she had ever said, done, felt, thought, seen, or replied, with egocentric delight.

Then, while he looked, she ceased speaking abruptly, put her neat gloved hand to her chin, and stared off with a thoughtful pursed mouth.

"Well," she said after a moment, "if you're getting your health back and spend a good part of your time lying around you ought to have something to occupy your mind." She opened a leather portmanteau she was carrying and produced a visiting card and two fat volumes. "My name," she said portentously, with slow emphasis, "is Eliza Pentland, and I represent the Larkin Publishing Company."

She spoke the words proudly, with dignified gusto. Merciful God! A book-agent! thought Gant.

"We are offering," said Eliza, opening a huge yellow book with a fancy design of spears and flags and laurel wreaths, "a book of poems called *Gems of Verse for Hearth and Fireside* as well as *Larkin's Domestic Doctor and Book of Household Remedies,* giving directions for the cure and prevention of over five hundred diseases."

"Well," said Gant, with a faint grin, wetting his big thumb briefly, "I ought to find one that I've got out of that."

"Why, yes," said Eliza, nodding smartly, "as the fellow says, you can read poetry for the good of your soul and Larkin for the good of your body."

"I like poetry," said Gant, thumbing over the pages, and pausing with interest at the section marked *Songs of the Spur and Sabre.* "In my boyhood I could recite it by the hour."

He bought the books. Eliza packed her samples, and stood up looking sharply and curiously about the dusty little shop.

"Doing any business?" she said.

"Very little," said Oliver sadly. "Hardly enough to keep body and soul together. I'm a stranger in a strange land."

"Pshaw!" said Eliza cheerfully. "You ought to get out and meet more people. You need something to take your mind off yourself. If I were you, I'd pitch right in and take an interest in the town's progress. We've got everything here it takes to make a big town—scenery, climate, and natural resources, and we all ought to work together. If I had a few thousand dollars I know what I'd do,"—she winked smartly at him, and began to speak with a curiously masculine gesture of the hand—forefinger extended, fist loosely clenched. "Do you see this corner here—the one you're on? It'll double in value in the next few years. Now, here!" she gestured before her with the loose masculine gesture. "They're going to run a street through there some day as sure as you live. And when they do—" she pursed her lips reflectively, "that property is going to be worth money."

She continued to talk about property with a strange meditative hunger. The town seemed to be an enormous blueprint to her: her head was stuffed uncannily with figures and estimates—who owned a lot, who sold it, the sale-price, the real value, the future value, first and second mortgages, and so on. When she had finished, Oliver said with the emphasis of strong aversion, thinking of Sydney:

"I hope I never own another piece of property as long as I live—save a house to live in. It is nothing but a curse and a care, and the tax-collector gets it all in the end."

Eliza looked at him with a startled expression, as if he had uttered a damnable heresy.

"Why, say! That's no way to talk!" she said. "You want to lay something by for a rainy day, don't you?"

"I'm having my rainy day now," he said gloomily. "All the property I need is eight feet of earth to be buried in."

Then, talking more cheerfully, he walked with her to the door of the shop, and watched her as she marched primly away across the square, holding her skirts at the curbs with ladylike nicety. Then he turned back among his marbles again with a stirring in him of a joy he thought he had lost forever.

The Pentland family, of which Eliza was a member, was one of the strangest tribes that ever came out of the hills. It had no clear title to the name of Pentland: a Scotch-Englishman of that name, who was a mining engineer, the grandfather of the present head of the family, had come into the hills after the Revolution, looking for copper, and lived there for several years, begetting several children by one of the pioneer women. When he disappeared the woman took for herself and her children the name of Pentland.

The present chieftain of the tribe was Eliza's father, the brother of the prophet Bacchus, Major Thomas Pentland. Another brother had been killed during the Seven Days. Major Pentland's military title was honestly if inconspicuously earned. While Bacchus, who never rose above the rank of Corporal, was blistering his hard hands at Shiloh, the Major, as commander of two companies of Home Volunteers, was guarding the stronghold of the native hills. This stronghold was never threatened until the closing days of the war, when the Volunteers, ambuscaded behind convenient trees and rocks, fired three volleys into a detachment of Sherman's stragglers, and quietly dispersed to the defense of their attendant wives and children.

The Pentland family was as old as any in the community, but it had always been poor, and had made few pretenses to gentility. By marriage, and by intermarriage among its own kinsmen, it could boast of some connection with the great, of some insanity, and a modicum of idiocy. But because of its obvious superiority, in intelligence and fibre, to most of the mountain people it held a position of solid respect among them.

The Pentlands bore a strong clan-marking. Like most rich personalities in strange families their powerful group-stamp became more impressive because of their differences. They had broad powerful noses, with fleshy deeply scalloped wings, sensual mouths, extraordinarily mixed of delicacy and coarseness, which in the process of thinking they convolved with astonishing flexibility, broad intelligent foreheads, and deep flat cheeks, a trifle hollowed. The men were generally ruddy of face, and their typical stature was meaty, strong, and of middling height, although it varied into gangling cadaverousness.

Major Thomas Pentland was the father of a numerous family of which Eliza was the only surviving girl. A younger sister had died a few years before of a disease which the family identified sorrowfully as "poor Jane's scrofula." There were six boys: Henry, the oldest, was now thirty, Will was twenty-six, Jim was twenty-two, and Thaddeus, Elmer, and Greeley were, in the order named, eighteen, fifteen, and eleven. Eliza was twenty-four.

The four oldest children, Henry, Will, Eliza, and Jim, had passed their childhood in the years following the war. The poverty and privation of these years had been so terrible that none of them ever spoke of it now, but the bitter steel had sheared into their hearts, leaving scars that would not heal.

The effect of these years upon the oldest children was to develop in them an insane niggardliness, an insatiate love of property, and a desire to escape from the major's household as quickly as possible.

"Father," Eliza had said with ladylike dignity, as she led Oliver for the first time into the sitting-room of the cottage, "I want you to meet Mr. Gant."

Major Pentland rose slowly from his rocker by the fire, folded a large knife, and put the apple he had been peeling on the mantel. Bacchus looked up benevolently from a whittled stick, and Will, glancing up from his stubby nails which he was paring as usual, greeted the visitor with a birdlike nod and wink. The men amused themselves constantly with pocket knives.

Major Pentland advanced slowly toward Gant. He was a stocky fleshy man in the middle fifties, with a ruddy face, a patriarchal beard, and the thick complacent features of his tribe.

"It's W. O. Gant, isn't it?" he asked in a drawling unctuous voice.

"Yes," said Oliver, "that's right."

"From what Eliza's been telling me about you," said the major, giving the signal to his audience, "I was going to say it ought to be L. E. Gant."

The room sounded with the fat pleased laughter of the Pentlands.

"Whew!" cried Eliza, putting her hand to the wing of her broad nose. "I'll vow, father! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Gant grinned with a thin false painting of mirth.

The miserable old scoundrel, he thought. He's had that one bottled up for a week.

"You've met Will before," said Eliza.

"Both before and aft," said Will with a smart wink.

When their laughter had died down, Eliza said: "And this—as the fellow says—is Uncle Bacchus."

"Yes, sir," said Bacchus beaming, "as large as life an' twice as sassy."

"They call him Back-us everywhere else," said Will, including them all in a brisk wink, "but here in the family we call him Behind-us."

"I suppose," said Major Pentland deliberately, "that you've served on a great many juries?"

"No," said Oliver, determined to endure the worst now with a frozen grin. "Why?"

"Because," said the Major looking around again, "I thought you were a fellow who'd done a lot of *courtin'*."

Then, amid their laughter, the door opened, and several of the others came in—Eliza's mother, a plain worn Scotchwoman, and Jim, a ruddy porcine young fellow, his father's beardless twin, and Thaddeus, mild, ruddy, brown of hair and eye, bovine, and finally Greeley, the youngest, a boy with lapping idiot grins, full of strange squealing noises at which they laughed. He was eleven, degenerate, weak, scrofulous, but his white moist hands could draw from a violin music that had in it something unearthly and untaught.

And as they sat there in the hot little room with its warm odor of mellowing apples, the vast winds howled down from the hills, there was a roaring in the pines, remote and demented, the bare boughs clashed. And as they peeled, or pared, or whittled, their talk slid from its rude jocularity to death and burial: they drawled monotonously, with evil hunger, their gossip of destiny, and of men but newly lain in the earth. And as their talk wore on, and Gant heard the spectre moan of the wind, he was entombed in loss and darkness, and his soul plunged downward in the pit of night, for he saw that he must die a stranger—that all, all but these triumphant Pentlands, who banqueted on death—must die.

And like a man who is perishing in the polar night, he thought of the rich meadows of his youth: the corn, the plum tree, and ripe grain. Why here? O lost!

II

Oliver married Eliza in May. After their wedding trip to Philadelphia, they returned to the house he had built for her on Woodson Street. With his great hands he had laid the foundations, burrowed out deep musty cellars in the earth, and sheeted the tall sides over with smooth trowellings of warm brown plaster. He had very little money, but his strange house grew to the rich modelling of his fantasy: when he had finished he had something which leaned to the slope of his narrow uphill yard, something with a high embracing porch in front, and warm rooms where one stepped up and down to the tackings of his whim. He built his house close to the quiet hilly street; he bedded the loamy soil with flowers; he laid the short walk to the high veranda steps with great square sheets of colored marble; he put a fence of spiked iron between his house and the world.

Then, in the cool long glade of yard that stretched four hundred feet behind the house he planted trees and grape vines. And whatever he touched in that rich fortress of his soul sprang into golden life: as the years passed, the fruit trees—the peach, the plum, the cherry, the apple—grew great and bent beneath their clusters. His grape vines thickened into brawny ropes of brown and coiled down the high wire fences of his lot, and hung in a dense fabric, upon his trellises, roping his domain twice around. They climbed the porch end of the house and framed the upper windows in thick bowers. And the flowers grew in rioting glory in his yard—the velvet-leaved nasturtium, slashed with a hundred tawny dyes, the rose, the snowball, the red-cupped tulip, and the lily. The honeysuckle drooped its heavy mass upon the fence; wherever his great hands touched the earth it grew fruitful for him.

For him the house was the picture of his soul, the garment of his will. But for Eliza it was a piece of property, whose value she shrewdly appraised, a beginning for her hoard. Like all the older children of Major Pentland she had, since her twentieth year, begun the slow accretion of land: from the savings of her small wage as teacher and book-agent, she had already purchased one or two pieces of earth. On one of these, a small lot at the edge of the public square, she persuaded him to build a shop. This he did with his own hands, and the labor of two negro men: it was a two-story shack of brick, with wide wooden steps, leading down to the square from a marble porch. Upon this porch, flanking the wooden doors, he placed some marbles; by the door, he put the heavy simpering figure of an angel.

But Eliza was not content with his trade: there was no money in death. People, she thought, died too slowly. And she foresaw that her brother, Will, who had begun at fifteen as helper in a lumber yard, and was now the owner of a tiny business, was destined to become a rich man. So she persuaded Gant to go into partnership with Will Pentland: at the end of a year, however, his patience broke, his tortured egotism leaped from its restraint, he howled that Will, whose business hours were spent chiefly in figuring upon a dirty envelope with a stub of a pencil, paring reflectively his stubby nails, or punning endlessly with a birdlike wink and nod, would ruin them all. Will therefore quietly bought out his partner's interest, and moved on toward the accumulation of a fortune, while Oliver returned to isolation and his grimy angels.

The strange figure of Oliver Gant cast its famous shadow through the town. Men heard at night and morning the great formula of his curse to Eliza. They saw him plunge to house and shop, they saw him bent above his marbles, they saw him mould in his great hands—with curse, and howl, with passionate devotion—the rich texture of his home. They laughed at his wild excess of speech, of feeling, and of gesture. They were silent before the maniac fury of his sprees, which occurred almost punctually every two months, and lasted two or three days. They picked him foul and witless from the cobbles, and brought him home—the banker, the policeman, and a burly devoted Swiss named Jannadeau, a grimy jeweller who rented a small fenced space among Gant's tombstones. And always they handled him with tender care, feeling something strange and proud and glorious lost in that drunken ruin of Babel. He was a stranger to them: no one—not even Eliza—ever called him by his first name. He was—and remained thereafter—"Mister" Gant.

And what Eliza endured in pain and fear and glory no one knew. He breathed over them all his hot lion-breath of desire and fury: when he was drunk, her white pursed face, and all the slow octopal movements of her temper, stirred him to red madness. She was at such times in real danger from his assault: she had to lock herself away from him. For from the first, deeper than love, deeper than hate, as deep as the unfleshed bones of life, an obscure and final warfare was being waged between them. Eliza wept or was silent to his curse, nagged briefly in retort to his rhetoric, gave like a punched pillow to his lunging drive—and slowly, implacably had her way. Year by year, above his howl of protest, he did not know how, they gathered in small bits of earth, paid the hated taxes, and put the money that remained into more land. Over the wife, over the mother, the woman of property, who was like a man, walked slowly forth.

In eleven years she bore him nine children of whom six lived. The first, a girl, died in her twentieth month, of infant cholera; two more died at birth. The others outlived the grim and casual littering. The oldest, a boy, was born in 1885. He was given the name of Steve. The second, born fifteen months later, was a girl—Daisy. The next, likewise a girl—Helen—came three years later. Then, in 1892, came twins—boys—to whom Gant, always with a zest for politics, gave the names of Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison. And the last, Luke, was born two years later, in 1894.

Twice, during this period, at intervals of five years, Gant's periodic spree lengthened into an unbroken drunkenness that lasted for weeks. He was caught, drowning in the tides of his thirst. Each time Eliza sent him away to take a cure for alcoholism at Richmond. Once, Eliza and four of her children were sick at the same time with typhoid fever. But during a weary convalescence she pursed her lips grimly and took them off to Florida.

Eliza came through stolidly to victory. As she marched down these enormous years of love and loss, stained with the rich dyes of pain and pride and death, and with the great wild flare of his alien and passionate life, her limbs faltered in the grip of ruin, but she came on, through sickness and emaciation, to victorious strength. She knew there had been glory in it: insensate and cruel as he had often been, she remembered the enormous beating color of his life, and the lost and stricken thing in him which he would never find. And fear and a speechless pity rose in her when at times she saw the small uneasy eyes grow still and darken with the foiled and groping hunger of old frustration. O lost!

III

In the great processional of the years through which the history of the Gants was evolving, few years had borne a heavier weight of pain, terror, and wretchedness, and none was destined to bring with it more conclusive events than that year which marked the beginning of the twentieth century. For Gant and his wife, the year 1900, in which one day they found themselves, after growing to maturity in another century—a transition which must have given, wherever it has happened, a brief but poignant loneliness to thousands of imaginative people—had coincidences, too striking to be unnoticed, with other boundaries in their lives.

In that year Gant passed his fiftieth birthday: he knew he was half as old as the century that had died, and that men do not often live as long as centuries. And in that year, too, Eliza, big with the last child she would ever have, went over the final hedge of terror and desperation and, in the opulent darkness of the summer night, as she lay flat in her bed with her hands upon her swollen belly, she began to design her life for the years when she would cease to be a mother.

In the already opening gulf on whose separate shores their lives were founded, she was beginning to look, with the infinite composure, the tremendous patience which waits through half a lifetime for an event, not so much with certain foresight, as with a prophetic, brooding instinct. This quality, this almost Buddhistic complacency which, rooted in the fundamental structure of her life, she could neither suppress nor conceal, was the quality he could least understand, that infuriated him most. He was fifty: he had a tragic consciousness of time—he saw the passionate fulness of his life upon the wane, and he cast about him like a senseless and infuriate beast. She had perhaps a greater reason for quietude than he, for she had come on from the cruel openings of her life, through disease, physical weakness, poverty, the constant imminence of death and misery: she had lost her first child, and brought the others safely through each succeeding plague; and now, at forty-two, her last child stirring in her womb, she had a conviction, enforced by her Scotch superstition, and the blind vanity of her family, which saw extinction for others but not for itself, that she was being shaped to a purpose.

As she lay in her bed, a great star burned across her vision in the western quarter of the sky; she fancied it was climbing heaven slowly. And although she could not have said toward what pinnacle her life was moving, she saw in the future freedom that she had never known, possession and power and wealth, the desire for which was mixed inextinguishably with the current of her blood. Thinking of this in the dark, she pursed her lips with thoughtful satisfaction, unhumorously seeing herself at work in the carnival, taking away quite easily from the hands of folly what it had never known how to keep.

"I'll get it!" she thought, "I'll get it. Will has it! Jim has it. And I'm smarter than they are." And with regret, tinctured with pain and bitterness, she thought of Gant:

"Pshaw! If I hadn't kept after him he wouldn't have a stick to call his own to-day. What little we have got I've had to fight for; we wouldn't have a roof over our heads; we'd spend the rest of our lives in a rented house"—which was to her the final ignominy of shiftless and improvident people.

And she resumed: "The money he squanders every year in licker would buy a good lot: we could be well-to-do people now if we'd started at the very beginning. But he's always hated the very idea of owning anything: couldn't bear it, he told me once, since he lost his money in that trade in Sydney. If I'd been there, you can bet your bottom dollar there'd been no loss. Or, it'd be on the other side," she added grimly.

And lying there while the winds of early autumn swept down from the Southern hills, filling the black air with dropping leaves, and making, in intermittent rushes, a remote sad thunder in great trees, she thought of the stranger who had come to live in her, and of that other stranger, author of so much woe, who had lived with her for almost twenty years. And thinking of Gant, she felt again an inchoate aching wonder, recalling the savage strife between them, and the great submerged struggle beneath, founded upon the hatred and the love of property, in which she did not doubt of her victory, but which baffled her, foiled her.

"I'll vow!" she whispered. "I'll vow! I never saw such a man!"

Gant, faced with the loss of sensuous delight, knowing the time had come when all his Rabelaisian excess in eating, drinking, and loving must come under the halter, knew of no gain that could compensate him for the loss of libertinism; he felt, too, the sharp ache of regret, feeling that he had possessed powers, had wasted chances, such as his partnership with Will Pentland, that might have given him position and wealth. He knew that the century had gone in which the best part of his life had passed; he felt, more than ever, the strangeness and loneliness of our little adventure upon the earth: he thought of his childhood on the Dutch farm, the Baltimore days, the aimless drift down the continent, the appalling fixation of his whole life upon a series of accidents. The enormous tragedy of accident hung like a gray cloud over his life. He saw more clearly than ever that he was a stranger in a strange land among people who would always be alien to him. Strangest of all, he thought, was this union, by which he had begotten children, created a life dependent on him, with a woman so remote from all he understood.

He did not know whether the year 1900 marked for him a beginning or an ending; but with the familiar weakness of the sensualist, he resolved to make it an ending, burning the spent fire in him down to a guttering flame. In the first half of the month of January, still penitently true to the New Year's reformation, he begot a child: by Spring, when it was evident that Eliza was again pregnant, he had hurled himself into an orgy to which even a notable four months' drunk in 1896 could offer no precedent. Day after day he became maniacally drunk, until he fixed himself in a state of constant insanity: in May she sent him off again to a sanitarium at Piedmont to take the "cure," which consisted simply in feeding him plainly and cheaply, and keeping him away from alcohol for six weeks, a régime which contributed no more ravenously to his hunger than it did to his thirst. He returned, outwardly chastened, but inwardly a raging furnace, toward the end of June: the day before he came back, Eliza, obviously big with child, her white face compactly set, walked sturdily into each of the town's fourteen saloons, calling up the proprietor or the bar-man behind his counter, and speaking clearly and loudly in the sodden company of bar clientry:

"See here: I just came in to tell you that Mr. Gant is coming back to-morrow, and I want you all to know that if I hear of any of you selling him a drink, I'll put you in the penitentiary."

The threat, they knew, was preposterous, but the white judicial face, the thoughtful pursing of the lips, and the right hand, which she held loosely clenched, like a man's, with the forefinger extended, emphasizing her proclamation with a calm, but somehow powerful gesture, froze them with a terror no amount of fierce excoriation could have produced. They received her announcement in beery stupefaction, muttering at most a startled agreement as she walked out.

"By God," said a mountaineer, sending a brown inaccurate stream toward a cuspidor, "she'll do it, too. That woman means business."

"Hell!" said Tim O'Donnel, thrusting his simian face comically above his counter, "I wouldn't give W. O. a drink now if it was fifteen cents a quart and we was alone in a privy. Is she gone yet?"

There was vast whisky laughter.

"Who is she?" some one asked.

"She's Will Pentland's sister."

"By God, she'll do it then," cried several; and the place trembled again with their laughter.

Will Pentland was in Loughran's when she entered. She did not greet him. When she had gone he turned to a man near him, prefacing his remark with a birdlike nod and wink: "Bet you can't do that," he said.

Gant, when he returned, and was publicly refused at a bar, was wild with rage and humiliation. He got whisky very easily, of course, by sending a drayman from his steps, or some negro, in for it; but, in spite of the notoriety of his conduct, which had, he knew, become a classic myth for the children of the town, he shrank at each new advertisement of his behaviour; he became, year by year, more, rather than less, sensitive to it, and his shame, his quivering humiliation on mornings after, product of rasped pride and jangled nerves, was pitiable. He felt bitterly that Eliza had with deliberate malice publicly degraded him: he screamed denunciation and abuse at her on his return home.

All through the summer Eliza walked with white boding placidity through horror—she had by now the hunger for it, waiting with terrible quiet the return of fear at night. Angered by her pregnancy, Gant went almost daily to Elizabeth's house in Eagle Crescent, whence he was delivered nightly by a band of exhausted and terrified prostitutes into the care of his son Steve, his oldest child, by now pertly free with nearly all the women in the district, who fondled him with good-natured vulgarity, laughed heartily at his glib innuendoes, and suffered him, even, to slap them smartly on their rumps, making for him roughly as he skipped nimbly away.

"Son," said Elizabeth, shaking Gant's waggling head vigorously, "don't you carry on, when you grow up, like the old rooster here. But he's a nice old boy when he wants to be," she continued, kissing the bald spot on his head, and deftly slipping into the boy's hand the wallet Gant had, in a torrent of generosity, given to her. She was scrupulously honest.

The boy was usually accompanied on these errands by Jannadeau and Tom Flack, a negro hack-man, who waited in patient constraint outside the latticed door of the brothel until the advancing tumult within announced that Gant had been enticed to depart. And he would go, either struggling clumsily and screaming eloquent abuse at his suppliant captors, or jovially acquiescent, bellowing a wanton song of his youth along the latticed crescent, and through the supper-silent highways of the town.

"Up in that back room, boys,
Up in *that* back room,
All among the fleas and bugs,
I pit-tee your sad doom."

Home, he would be cajoled up the tall veranda stairs, enticed into his bed; or, resisting all compulsion, he would seek out his wife, shut usually in her room, howling taunts at her, and accusations of unchastity, since there festered in him dark suspicion, fruit of his age, his wasting energy. Timid Daisy, pale from fright, would have fled to the neighboring arms of Sudie Isaacs, or to the Tarkintons; Helen, aged ten, even then his delight, would master him, feeding spoonfuls of scalding soup into his mouth, and slapping him sharply with her small hand when he became recalcitrant.

"You *drink* this! You better!"

He was enormously pleased: they were both strung on the same wires.

Again, he was beyond all reason. Extravagantly mad, he built roaring fires in his sitting-room, drenching the leaping fire with a can of oil; spitting exultantly into the answering roar, and striking up, until he was exhausted, a profane chant, set to a few recurrent bars of music, which ran, for forty minutes, somewhat like this:

"O-ho—Goddam,
Goddam, Goddam,
O-ho—Goddam,
Goddam—Goddam."

—adopting usually the measure by which clock-chimes strike out the hour.

And outside, strung like apes along the wide wires of the fence, Sandy and Fergus Duncan, Seth Tarkinton, sometimes Ben and Grover themselves, joining in the glee of their friends, kept up an answering chant:

"Old man Gant
Came home drunk!
Old man Gant
Came home drunk!"

Daisy, from a neighbor's sanctuary, wept in shame and fear. But Helen, small thin fury, held on relentlessly: presently he would subside into a chair, and receive hot soup and stinging slaps with a grin. Upstairs Eliza lay, white-faced and watchfully.

So ran the summer by. The last grapes hung in dried and rotten clusters to the vines; the wind roared distantly; September ended.

One night the dry doctor, Cardiac, said: "I think we'll be through with this before to-morrow evening." He departed, leaving in the house a middle-aged country woman. She was a hard-handed practical nurse.

At eight o'clock Gant returned alone. The boy Steve had stayed at home for ready despatch at Eliza's need; for the moment the attention was shifted from the master.

His great voice below, chanting obscenities, carried across the neighborhood: as she heard the sudden wild roar of flame up the chimney, shaking the house in its flight, she called Steve to her side, tensely: "Son, he'll burn us all up!" she whispered.

They heard a chair fall heavily below, his curse; they heard his heavy reeling stride across the dining-room and up the hall; they heard the sagging creak of the stair-rail as his body swung against it.

"He's coming!" she whispered, "He's coming! Lock the door, son!"

The boy locked the door.

"Are you there?" Gant roared, pounding the flimsy door heavily with his great fist. "Miss Eliza: are you there?" howling at her the ironical title by which he addressed her at moments like this.

And he screamed a sermon of profanity and woven invective:—

"Little did I reck," he began, getting at once into the swing of preposterous rhetoric which he used half furiously, half comically, "little did I reck the day I first saw her eighteen bitter years ago, when she came wriggling around the corner at me like a snake on her belly—[a stock epithet which from repetition was now heart-balm to him]—little did I reck that—that—that it would come to this," he finished lamely. He waited quietly, in the heavy silence, for some answer, knowing that she lay in her white-faced calm behind the door, and filled with the old choking fury because he knew she would not answer.

"Are you there? I say, are you there, woman?" he howled, barking his big knuckles in a furious bombardment.

There was nothing but the white living silence.

"Ah me! Ah me!" he sighed with strong self-pity, then burst into forced snuffling sobs, which furnished a running accompaniment to his denunciation. "Merciful God!" he wept, "it's fearful, it's awful, it's croo-el. What have I ever done that God should punish me like this in my old age?"

There was no answer.

"Cynthia! Cynthia!" he howled suddenly, invoking the memory of his first wife, the gaunt tubercular spinstress whose life, it was said, his conduct had done nothing to prolong, but whom he was fond of supplicating now, realizing the hurt, the anger he caused to Eliza by doing so. "Cynthia! O Cynthia! Look down upon me in my hour of need! Give me succour! Give me aid! Protect me against this fiend out of Hell!"

And he continued, weeping in heavy snuffling burlesque: "O-boo-hoo-hoo! Come down and save me, I beg of you, I entreat you, I implore you, or I perish."

Silence answered.

"Ingratitude, more fierce than brutish beasts," Gant resumed, getting off on another track, fruitful with mixed and mangled quotation. "You will be punished, as sure as there's a just God in heaven. You will all be punished. Kick the old man, strike him, throw him out on the street: he's no good any more. He's no longer able to provide for the family—send him over the hill to the poorhouse. That's where he belongs. Rattle his bones over the stones. Honor thy father that thy days may be long. Ah, Lord!

"'Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through;
See what a rent the envious Casca made;
Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabbed;
And, as he plucked his cursèd steel away,
Mark how the blood of Cæsar followed it——'"

"Jeemy," said Mrs. Duncan at this moment to her husband, "Ye'd better go over. He's loose agin, an' she's wi' chile."

The Scotchman thrust back his chair, moved strongly out of the ordered ritual of his life, and the warm fragrance of new-baked bread.

At the gate, outside Gant's, he found patient Jannadeau, fetched down by Ben. They spoke matter-of-factly, and hastened up the steps as they heard a crash upstairs, and a woman's cry. Eliza, in only her night-dress, opened the door:

"Come quick!" she whispered. "Come quick!"

"By God, I'll kill her," Gant screamed, plunging down the stairs at greater peril to his own life than to any other. "I'll kill her now, and put an end to my misery."

He had a heavy poker in his hand. The two men seized him; the burly jeweller took the poker from his hand with quiet strength.

"He cut his head on the bed-rail, mama," said Steve descending. It was true: Gant bled.

"Go for your Uncle Will, son. Quick!" He was off like a hound.

"I think he meant it that time," she whispered.

Duncan shut the door against the gaping line of neighbors beyond the gate.

"Ye'll be gettin' a cheel like that, Mrs. Gant."

"Keep him away from me! Keep him away!" she cried out strongly.

"Aye, I will that!" he answered in quiet Scotch.

She turned to go up the stairs, but on the second step she fell heavily to her knees. The country nurse, returning from the bathroom, in which she had locked herself, ran to her aid. She went up slowly then between the woman and Grover. Outside Ben dropped nimbly from the low eave on to the lily beds: Seth Tarkinton, clinging to fence wires, shouted greetings.

Gant went off docilely, somewhat dazed, between his two guardians: as his huge limbs sprawled brokenly in his rocker, they undressed him. Helen had already been busy in the kitchen for some time: she appeared now with boiling soup.

Gant's dead eyes lit with recognition as he saw her.

"Why baby," he roared, making a vast maudlin circle with his arms, "how are you?" She put the soup down; he swept her thin body crushingly against him, brushing her cheek and neck with his stiff-bristled mustache, breathing upon her the foul rank odor of rye whisky.

"Oh, he's cut himself!" the little girl thought she was going to cry.

"Look what they did to me, baby," he pointed to his wound and whimpered.

Will Pentland, true son of that clan who forgot one another never, and who saw one another only in times of death, pestilence, and terror, came in.

"Good evening, Mr. Pentland," said Duncan.

"Jus' tolable," he said, with his bird-like nod and wink, taking in both men good-naturedly. He stood in front of the fire, paring meditatively at his blunt nails with a dull knife. It was his familiar gesture when in company: no one, he felt, could see what you thought about anything, if you pared your nails.

The sight of him drew Gant instantly from his lethargy: he remembered the dissolved partnership; the familiar attitude of Will Pentland, as he stood before the fire, evoked all the markings he so heartily loathed in the clan—its pert complacency, its incessant punning, its success.

"Mountain Grills!" he roared. "Mountain Grills! The lowest of the low! The vilest of the vile!"

"Mr. Gant! Mr. Gant!" pleaded Jannadeau.

"What's the matter with you, W. O.?" asked Will Pentland, looking up innocently from his fingers. "Had something to eat that didn't agree with you?"—he winked pertly at Duncan, and went back to his fingers.

"Your miserable old father," howled Gant, "was horsewhipped on the public square for not paying his debts." This was a purely imaginative insult, which had secured itself as truth, however, in Gant's mind, as had so many other stock epithets, because it gave him heart-cockle satisfaction.

"Horsewhipped upon his public square, was he?" Will winked again, unable to resist the opening. "They kept it mighty quiet, didn't they?" But behind the intense good-humored posture of his face, his eyes were hard. He pursed his lips meditatively as he worked upon his fingers.

"But I'll tell you something about him, W. O.," he continued after a moment, with calm but boding judiciousness. "He let his wife die a natural death in her own bed. He didn't try to kill her."

"No, by God!" Gant rejoined. "He let her starve to death. If the old woman ever got a square meal in her life she got it under my roof. There's one thing sure: she could have gone to Hell and back, twice over, before she got it from old Tom Pentland, or any of his sons."

Will Pentland closed his blunt knife and put it in his pocket.

"Old Major Pentland never did an honest day's work in his life," Gant yelled, as a happy afterthought.

"Come now, Mr. Gant!" said Duncan reproachfully.

"Hush! Hush!" whispered the girl fiercely, coming before him closely with the soup. She thrust a smoking ladle at his mouth, but he turned his head away to hurl another insult. She slapped him sharply across the mouth.

"You *drink* this!" she whispered. And grinning meekly as his eyes rested upon her, he began to swallow soup.

Will Pentland looked at the girl attentively for a moment, then glanced at Duncan and Jannadeau with a nod and wink. Without saying another word, he left the room, and mounted the stairs. His sister lay quietly extended on her back.

"How do you feel, Eliza?" The room was heavy with the rich odor of mellowing pears; an unaccustomed fire of pine sticks burned in the grate: he took up his place before it, and began to pare his nails.

"Nobody knows—nobody knows," she began, bursting quickly into a rapid flow of tears, "what I've been through." She wiped her eyes in a moment on a corner of the coverlid: her broad powerful nose, founded redly on her white face, was like flame.

"What you got good to eat?" he said, winking at her with a comic gluttony.

"There are some pears in there on the shelf, Will. I put them there last week to mellow."

He went into the big closet and returned in a moment with a large yellow pear; he came back to the hearth and opened the smaller blade of his knife.

"I'll vow, Will," she said quietly after a moment. "I've had all I can put up with. I don't know what's got into him. But you can bet your bottom dollar I won't stand much more of it. I know how to shift for myself," she said, nodding her head smartly. He recognized the tone.

He almost forgot himself: "See here, Eliza," he began, "if you were thinking of building somewhere, I"—but he recovered himself in time—"I'll—I'll make you the best price you can get on the material," he concluded. He thrust a slice of pear quickly into his mouth.

She pursed her mouth rapidly for some moments.

"No," she said. "I'm not ready for that yet, Will. I'll let you know." The loose wood-coals crumbled on the hearth.

"I'll let you know," she said again. He clasped his knife and thrust it in a trousers pocket.

"Good night, Eliza," he said. "I reckon Pett will be in to see you. I'll tell her you're all right."

He went down the stairs quietly, and let himself out through the front door. As he descended the tall veranda steps, Duncan and Jannadeau came quietly down the yard from the sitting-room.

"How's W. O.?" he asked.

"Ah, he'll be all right now," said Duncan cheerfully. "He's fast asleep."

"The sleep of the righteous?" asked Will Pentland with a wink.

The Swiss resented the implied jeer at his Titan. "It is a gread bitty," began Jannadeau in a low guttural voice, "that Mr. Gant drinks. With his mind he could go far. When he's sober a finer man doesn't live."

"When he's sober?" said Will, winking at him in the dark. "What about when he's asleep?"

"He's all right the minute Helen gets hold of him," Mr. Duncan remarked in his rich voice. "It's wonderful what that little girl can do to him."

"Ah, I tell you!" Jannadeau laughed with guttural pleasure. "That little girl knows her daddy in and out."

The child sat in the big chair by the waning sitting-room fire: she read until the flames had died to coals—then quietly she shovelled ashes on them. Gant, fathoms deep in slumber, lay on the smooth leather sofa against the wall. She had wrapped him well in a blanket; now she put a pillow on a chair and placed his feet on it. He was rank with whisky stench; the window rattled as he snored.

Thus, drowned in oblivion, ran his night; he slept when the great pangs of birth began in Eliza at two o'clock; slept through all the patient pain and care of doctor, nurse, and wife.

IV

The baby was, to reverse an epigram, an unconscionable time in getting born; but when Gant finally awoke just after ten o'clock next morning, whimpering from tangled nerves, and the quivering shame of dim remembrance, he heard, as he drank the hot coffee Helen brought to him, a loud, long lungy cry above.

"Oh, my God, my God," he groaned. And he pointed toward the sound. "Is it a boy or a girl?"

"I haven't seen it yet, papa," Helen answered. "They won't let us in. But Doctor Cardiac came out and told us if we were good he might bring us a little boy."

There was a terrific clatter on the tin roof, the scolding country voice of the nurse: Steve dropped like a cat from the porch roof to the lily bed outside Gant's window.

"Steve, you damned scoundrel," roared the manor-lord with a momentary return to health, "what in the name of Jesus are you doing?"

The boy was gone over the fence.

"I seen it! I seen it!" his voice came streaking back.

"I seen it too!" screamed Grover, racing through the room and out again in simple exultancy.

"If I catch you younguns on this roof agin," yelled the country nurse aloft, "I'll take your hide off you."

Gant had been momentarily cheered when he heard that his latest heir was a male; but he walked the length of the room now, making endless plaint.

"Oh my God, my God! Did this have to be put upon me in my old age? Another mouth to feed! It's fearful, it's awful, it's croo-el," and he began to weep affectedly. Then, realizing presently that no one was near enough to be touched by his sorrow, he paused suddenly and precipitated himself toward the door, crossing the dining-room, and going up the hall, making loud lament:

"Eliza! My wife! Oh, baby, say that you forgive me!" He went up the stairs, sobbing laboriously.

"Don't you let him in here!" cried the object of this prayer sharply with quite remarkable energy.

"Tell him he can't come in now," said Cardiac, in his dry voice, to the nurse, staring intently at the scales. "We've nothing but milk to drink, anyway," he added.

Gant was outside.

"Eliza, my wife! Be merciful, I beg of you. If I had known——"

"Yes," said the country nurse opening the door rudely, "if the dog hadn't stopped to lift his leg he'd a-caught the rabbit! You get away from here!" And she slammed it violently in his face.

He went downstairs with hang-dog head, but he grinned slyly as he thought of the nurse's answer. He wet his big thumb quickly on his tongue.

"Merciful God!" he said, and grinned. Then he set up his caged lament.

"I think this will do," said Cardiac, holding up something red, shiny, and puckered by its heels, and smacking it briskly on its rump, to liven it a bit.

The heir apparent had, as a matter of fact, made his debut completely equipped with all appurtenances, dependences, screws, cocks, faucets, hooks, eyes, nails, considered necessary for completeness of appearance, harmony of parts, and unity of effect in this most energetic, driving, and competitive world. He was the complete male in miniature, the tiny acorn from which the mighty oak must grow, the heir of all the ages, the inheritor of unfulfilled renown, the child of progress, the darling of the budding Golden Age and, what's more, Fortune and her Fairies, not content with well-nigh smothering him with these blessings of time and family, saved him up carefully until Progress was rotten-ripe with glory.

"Well, what are you going to call it?" inquired Dr. Cardiac, referring thus, with shocking and medical coarseness, to this most royal imp.

Eliza was better tuned to cosmic vibrations. With a full, if inexact, sense of what portended, she gave to Luck's Lad the title of Eugene, a name which, beautifully, means "well born," but which, as any one will be able to testify, does not mean, has never meant, "well bred."

This chosen incandescence, to whom a name had already been given, and from whose centre most of the events in this chronicle must be seen, was borne in, as we have said, upon the very spear-head of history. But perhaps, reader, you have already thought of that? You *haven't?* Then let us refresh your historical memory.

By 1900, Oscar Wilde and James A. McNeill Whistler had almost finished saying the things they were reported as saying, and that Eugene was destined to hear, twenty years later; most of the Great Victorians had died before the bombardment began; William McKinley was up for a second term, the crew of the Spanish navy had returned home in a tugboat.

Abroad, grim old Britain had sent her ultimatum to the South Africans in 1899; Lord Roberts ("Little Bobs," as he was known affectionately to his men) was appointed commander-in-chief after several British reverses; the Transvaal Republic was annexed to Great Britain in September 1900, and formally annexed in the month of Eugene's birth. There was a Peace Conference two years later.

Meanwhile, what was going on in Japan? I will tell you: the first parliament met in 1891, there was a war with China in 1894–95, Formosa was ceded in 1895. Moreover, Warren Hastings had been impeached and tried; Pope Sixtus the Fifth had come and gone; Dalmatia had been subdued by Tiberius; Belisarius had been blinded by Justinian; the wedding and funeral ceremonies of Wilhelmina Charlotte Caroline of Brandenburg-Ansbach and King George the Second had been solemnized, while those of Berengaria of Navarre to King Richard the First were hardly more than a distant memory; Diocletian, Charles the Fifth, and Victor Amadeus of Sardinia, had all abdicated their thrones; Henry James Pye, Poet Laureate of England, was with his fathers; Cassiodorus, Quintilian, Juvenal, Lucretius, Martial, and Albert the Bear of Brandenburg had answered the last great roll-call; the battles of Antietam, Smolensko, Drumclog, Inkerman, Marengo, Cawnpore, Killiecrankie, Sluys, Actium, Lepanto, Tewkesbury, Brandywine, Hohenlinden, Salamis, and the Wilderness had been fought both by land and by sea; Hippias had been expelled from Athens by the Alcæmonidæ and the Lacedæmonians; Simonides, Menander, Strabo, Moschus, and Pindar had closed their earthly accounts; the beatified Eusebius, Athanasius, and Chrysostom had gone to their celestial niches; Menkaura had built the Third Pyramid; Aspalta had led victorious armies; the remote Bermudas, Malta, and the Windward Isles had been colonized. In addition, the Spanish Armada had been defeated; President Abraham Lincoln assassinated, and the Halifax Fisheries Award had given $5,500,000 to Britain for twelve-year fishing privileges. Finally, only thirty or forty million years before, our earliest ancestors had crawled out of the primeval slime; and then, no doubt, finding the change unpleasant, crawled back in again.

Such was the state of history when Eugene entered the theatre of human events in 1900.

We would give willingly some more extended account of the world his life touched during the first few years, showing, in all its perspectives and implications, the meaning of life as seen from the floor, or from the crib, but these impressions are suppressed when they might be told, not through any fault of intelligence, but through lack of muscular control, the powers of articulation, and because of the recurring waves of loneliness, weariness, depression, aberration, and utter blankness which war against the order in a man's mind until he is three or four years old.

Lying darkly in his crib, washed, powdered, and fed, he thought quietly of many things before he dropped off to sleep—the interminable sleep that obliterated time for him, and that gave him a sense of having missed forever a day of sparkling life. At these moments, he was heartsick with weary horror as he thought of the discomfort, weakness, dumbness, the infinite misunderstanding he would have to endure before he gained even physical freedom. He grew sick as he thought of the weary distance before him, the lack of co-ordination of the centres of control, the undisciplined and rowdy bladder, the helpless exhibition he was forced to give in the company of his sniggering, pawing brothers and sisters, dried, cleaned, revolved before them.

He was in agony because he was poverty-stricken in symbols: his mind was caught in a net because he had no words to work with. He had not even names for the objects around him: he probably defined them for himself by some jargon, reinforced by some mangling of the speech that roared about him, to which he listened intently day after day, realizing that his first escape must come through language. He indicated as quickly as he could his ravenous hunger for pictures and print: sometimes they brought him great books profusely illustrated, and he bribed them desperately by cooing, shrieking with delight, making extravagant faces, and doing all the other things they understood in him. He wondered savagely how they would feel if they knew what he really thought: at other times he had to laugh at them and at their whole preposterous comedy of errors as they pranced around for his amusement, waggled their heads at him, tickled him roughly, making him squeal violently against his will. The situation was at once profoundly annoying and comic: as he sat in the middle of the floor and watched them enter, seeing the face of each transformed by a foolish leer, and hearing their voices become absurd and sentimental whenever they addressed him, speaking to him words which he did not yet understand, but which he saw they were mangling in the preposterous hope of rendering intelligible that which has been previously mutilated, he had to laugh at the fools, in spite of his vexation.

And left alone to sleep within a shuttered room, with the thick sunlight printed in bars upon the floor, unfathomable loneliness and sadness crept through him: he saw his life down the solemn vista of a forest aisle, and he knew he would always be the sad one: caged in that little round of skull, imprisoned in that beating and most secret heart, his life must always walk down lonely passages. Lost. He understood that men were forever strangers to one another, that no one ever comes really to know any one, that imprisoned in the dark womb of our mother, we come to life without having seen her face, that we are given to her arms a stranger, and that, caught in that insoluble prison of being, we escape it never, no matter what arms may clasp us, what mouth may kiss us, what heart may warm us. Never, never, never, never, never.

He saw that the great figures that came and went about him, the huge leering heads that bent hideously into his crib, the great voices that rolled incoherently above him, had for one another not much greater understanding than they had for him: that even their speech, their entire fluidity and ease of movement were but meagre communicants of their thought or feeling, and served often not to promote understanding, but to deepen and widen strife, bitterness, and prejudice.

His brain went black with terror. He saw himself an inarticulate stranger, an amusing little clown, to be dandled and nursed by these enormous and remote figures. He had been sent from one mystery into another: somewhere within or without his consciousness he heard a great bell ringing faintly, as if it sounded undersea, and as he listened, the ghost of memory walked through his mind, and for a moment he felt that he had almost recovered what he had lost.

Sometimes, pulling himself abreast the high walls of his crib, he glanced down dizzily at the patterns of the carpet far below; the world swam in and out of his mind like a tide, now printing its whole sharp picture for an instant, again ebbing out dimly and sleepily, while he pieced the puzzle of sensation together bit by bit, seeing only the dancing fire-sheen on the poker, hearing then the elfin clucking of the sun-warm hens, somewhere beyond in a distant and enchanted world. Again, he heard their morning-wakeful crowing clear and loud, suddenly becoming a substantial and alert citizen of life; or, going and coming in alternate waves of fantasy and fact, he heard the loud, faery thunder of Daisy's parlor music. Years later, he heard it again, a door opened in his brain: she told him it was Paderewski's "Minuet."

His crib was a great woven basket, well mattressed and pillowed within; as he grew stronger, he was able to perform extraordinary acrobatics in it, tumbling, making a hoop of his body, and drawing himself easily and strongly erect: with patient effort he could worm over the side on to the floor. There, he would crawl on the vast design of the carpet, his eyes intent upon great wooden blocks piled chaotically on the floor. They had belonged to his brother Luke: all the letters of the alphabet, in bright multi-colored carving, were engraved upon them.

Holding them clumsily in his tiny hands, he studied for hours the symbols of speech, knowing that he had here the stones of the temple of language, and striving desperately to find the key that would draw order and intelligence from this anarchy. Great voices soared far above him, vast shapes came and went, lifting him to dizzy heights, depositing him with exhaustless strength. The bell rang under the sea.

One day when the opulent Southern Spring had richly unfolded, when the spongy black earth of the yard was covered with sudden, tender grass, and wet blossoms, the great cherry tree seethed slowly with a massive gem of amber sap, and the cherries hung ripening in prodigal clusters, Gant took him from his basket in the sun on the high front porch, and went with him around the house by the lily beds, taking him back under trees singing with hidden birds, to the far end of the lot.

Here the earth was unshaded, dry, clotted by the plough Eugene knew by the stillness that it was Sunday: against the high wire fence there was the heavy smell of hot dock-weed. On the other side, Swain's cow was wrenching the cool coarse grass, lifting her head from time to time, and singing in her strong deep voice her Sunday exuberance. In the warm washed air, Eugene heard with absolute clearness all the brisk backyard sounds of the neighborhood, he became acutely aware of the whole scene, and as Swain's cow sang out again, he felt the flooded gates in him swing open. He answered "Moo!" phrasing the sound timidly but perfectly, and repeating it confidently in a moment when the cow answered.

Gant's delight was boundless. He turned and raced back toward the house at the full stride of his legs. And as he went, he nuzzled his stiff mustache into Eugene's tender neck, mooing industriously and always getting an answer.

"Lord a' mercy!" cried Eliza, looking from the kitchen window as he raced down the yard with breakneck strides, "He'll kill that child yet."

And as he rushed up the kitchen steps—all the house, save the upper side was off the ground—she came out on the little latticed veranda, her hands floury, her nose stove-red.

"Why, what on earth are you doing, Mr. Gant?"

"Moo-o-o! He said 'Moo-o-o!' Yes he did!" Gant spoke to Eugene rather than to Eliza.

Eugene answered him immediately: he felt it was all rather silly, and he saw he would be kept busy imitating Swain's cow for several days, but he was tremendously excited, nevertheless, feeling now that the wall had been breached.

Eliza was likewise thrilled, but her way of showing it was to turn back to the stove, hiding her pleasure, and saying: "I'll vow, Mr. Gant. I never saw such an idiot with a child."

Later, Eugene lay wakefully in his basket on the sitting-room floor, watching the smoking dishes go by in the eager hands of the combined family, for Eliza at this time cooked magnificently, and a Sunday dinner was something to remember. For two hours since their return from church, the little boys had been prowling hungrily around the kitchen: Ben, frowning proudly, kept his dignity outside the screen, making excursions frequently through the house to watch the progress of cookery; Grover came in and watched with frank interest until he was driven out; Luke, his broad humorous little face split by a wide exultant smile, rushed through the house, squealing exultantly:

"Weenie, weedie, weeky
Weenie, weedie, weeky,
Weenie, weedie, weeky,
Wee, Wee, Wee."

He had heard Daisy and Josephine Brown doing Cæsar together, and his chant was his own interpretation of Cæsar's brief boast: "Veni, Vidi, Vici."

As Eugene lay in his crib, he heard through the open door the dining-room clatter, the shrill excitement of the boys, the clangor of steel and knife as Gant prepared to carve the roast, the repetition of the morning's great event told over and over without variation, but with increasing zest.

"Soon," he thought, as the heavy food fragrance floated in to him, "I shall be in there with them." And he thought lusciously of mysterious and succulent food.

All through the afternoon upon the veranda Gant told the story, summoning the neighbors and calling upon Eugene to perform. Eugene heard clearly all that was said that day: he was not able to answer, but he saw now that speech was imminent.

Thus, later, he saw the first two years of his life in brilliant and isolated flashes. His second Christmas he remembered vaguely as a period of great festivity: it accustomed him to the third when it came. With the miraculous habitude children acquire, it seemed that he had known Christmas forever.

He was conscious of sunlight, rain, the leaping fire, his crib, the grim jail of winter: the second Spring, one warm day, he saw Daisy go off to school up the hill: it was the end of the noon recess, she had been home for lunch. She went to Miss Ford's School For Girls; it was a red brick residence on the corner at the top of the steep hill: he watched her join Eleanor Duncan just below. Her hair was braided in two long hanks down her back: she was demure, shy, maidenly, a timid and blushing girl; but he feared her attentions to him, for she bathed him furiously, wreaking whatever was explosive and violent beneath her placidity upon his hide. She really scrubbed him almost raw. He howled piteously. As she climbed the hill, he remembered her. He saw she was the same person.

He passed his second birthday with the light growing. Early in the following Spring he became conscious of a period of neglect: the house was deadly quiet; Gant's voice no longer roared around him, the boys came and went on stealthy feet. Luke, the fourth to be attacked by the pestilence, was desperately ill with typhoid: Eugene was intrusted almost completely to a young slovenly negress. He remembered vividly her tall slattern figure, her slapping lazy feet, her dirty white stockings, and her strong smell, black and funky. One day she took him out on the side porch to play: it was a young Spring morning, bursting moistly from the thaw of the earth. The negress sat upon the side-steps and yawned while he grubbed in his dirty little dress along the path, and upon the lily bed. Presently, she went to sleep against the post. Craftily, he wormed his body through the wide wires of the fence, into the cindered alley that wound back to the Swains', and up to the ornate wooden palace of the Hilliards.

They were among the highest aristocracy of the town: they had come from South Carolina, "near Charleston," which in itself gave them at that time a commanding prestige. The house, a huge gabled structure of walnut-brown, which gave the effect of many angles and no plan, was built upon the top of the hill which sloped down to Gant's; the level ground on top before the house was tenanted by lordly towering oaks. Below, along the cindered alley, flanking Gant's orchard, there were high singing pines.

Mr. Hilliard's house was considered one of the finest residences in the town. The neighborhood was middle-class, but the situation was magnificent, and the Hilliards carried on in the grand manner, lords of the castle who descended into the village, but did not mix with its people. All of their friends arrived by carriage from afar; every day punctually at two o'clock, an old liveried negro drove briskly up the winding alley behind two sleek brown mares, waiting under the carriage entrance at the side until his master and mistress should come out. Five minutes later they drove out, and were gone for two hours.

This ritual, followed closely from his father's sitting-room window, fascinated Eugene for years after: the people and the life next door were crudely and symbolically above him.

He felt a great satisfaction that morning in being at length in Hilliard's alley: it was his first escape, and it had been made into a forbidden and enhaloed region. He grubbed about in the middle of the road, disappointed in the quality of the cinders. The booming court-house bell struck eleven times.

Now, exactly at three minutes after eleven every morning, so unfailing and perfect was the order of this great establishment, a huge gray horse trotted slowly up the hill, drawing behind him a heavy grocery wagon, musty, spicy, odorous with the fine smells of grocery-stores and occupied exclusively by the Hilliard victuals, and the driver, a young negro man who, at three minutes past eleven every morning, according to ritual, was comfortably asleep. Nothing could possibly go wrong: the horse could not have been tempted even by a pavement of oats to betray his sacred mission.

Accordingly he trotted heavily up the hill, turned ponderously into the alley ruts, and advanced heavily until, feeling the great circle of his right forefoot obstructed by some foreign particle, he looked down and slowly removed his hoof from what had recently been the face of a little boy.

Then, with his legs carefully straddled, he moved on, drawing the wagon beyond Eugene's body, and stopping. Both negroes awoke simultaneously; there were cries within the house, and Eliza and Gant rushed out of doors. The frightened negro lifted Eugene, who was quite unconscious of his sudden return to the stage, into the burly arms of Doctor McGuire, who cursed the driver eloquently. His thick sensitive fingers moved swiftly around the bloody little face and found no fracture.

He nodded briefly at their desperate faces: "He's being saved for Congress," said he. "You have bad luck and hard heads, W. O."

"You Goddamned black scoundrel," yelled the master, turning with violent relief upon the driver. "I'll put you behind the bars for this." He thrust his great length of hands through the fence and choked the negro, who mumbled prayers, and had no idea what was happening to him, save that he was the centre of a wild commotion.

The negro girl, blubbering, had fled inward.

"This looks worse than it is," observed Dr. McGuire, laying the hero upon the lounge. "Some hot water, please." Nevertheless, it took two hours to bring him round. Every one spoke highly of the horse.

"He had more sense than the nigger," said Gant, wetting his thumb.

But all this, as Eliza knew in her heart, was part of the plan of the Dark Sisters. The entrails had been woven and read long since: the frail shell of skull which guarded life, and which might have been crushed as easily as a man breaks an egg, was kept intact. But Eugene carried the mark of the centaur for many years, though the light had to fall properly to reveal it.

When he was older, he wondered sometimes if the Hilliards had issued from their high place when he had so impiously disturbed the order of the manor. He never asked, but he thought not: he imagined them, at the most, as standing superbly by a drawn curtain, not quite certain what had happened, but feeling that it was something unpleasant, with blood in it.

Shortly after this, Mr. Hilliard had a "No-Trespassing" sign staked up in the lot.

V

Luke got well after cursing doctor, nurse, and family for several weeks: it was stubborn typhoid.

Gant was now head of a numerous family, which rose ladderwise from infancy to the adolescent Steve—who was eighteen—and the maidenly Daisy. She was seventeen and in her last year at high school. She was a timid, sensitive girl, looking like her name—Daisy-ish industrious and thorough in her studies: her teachers thought her one of the best students they had ever known. She had very little fire, or denial in her; she responded dutifully to instructions; she gave back what had been given to her. She played the piano without any passionate feeling for the music; but she rendered it honestly with a beautiful rippling touch. And she practised hours at a time.

It was apparent, however, that Steve was lacking in scholarship. When he was fourteen, he was summoned by the school principal to his little office, to take a thrashing for truancy and insubordination. But the spirit of acquiesence was not in him: he snatched the rod from the man's hand, broke it, smote him solidly in the eye, and dropped gleefully eighteen feet to the ground.

This was one of the best things he ever did: his conduct in other directions was less fortunate. Very early, as his truancy mounted, and after he had been expelled, and as his life hardened rapidly in a defiant viciousness, the antagonism between the boy and Gant grew open and bitter. Gant recognized perhaps most of his son's vices as his own: there was little, however, of his redeeming quality. Steve had a piece of tough suet where his heart should have been.

Of them all, he had had very much the worst of it. Since his childhood he had been the witness of his father's wildest debauches. He had not forgotten. Also, as the oldest, he was left to shift for himself while Eliza's attention focussed on her younger children. She was feeding Eugene at her breast long after Steve had taken his first two dollars to the ladies of Eagle Crescent.

He was inwardly sore at the abuse Gant heaped on him; he was not insensitive to his faults, but to be called a "good-for-nothing bum," "a worthless degenerate," "a pool-room loafer," hardened his outward manner of swagger defiance. Cheaply and flashily dressed, with peg-top yellow shoes, flaring striped trousers, and a broad-brimmed straw hat with a colored band, he would walk down the avenue with a preposterous lurch, and a smile of strained assurance on his face, saluting with servile cordiality all who would notice him. And if a man of property greeted him, his lacerated but overgrown vanity would seize the crumb, and he would boast pitifully at home: "They all know Little Stevie! He's got the respect of all the big men in this town, all right, all right! Every one has a good word for Little Stevie except his own people. Do you know what J. T. Collins said to me to-day?"

"What say? Who's that? Who's that?" asked Eliza with comic rapidity, looking up from her darning.

"J. T. Collins—that's who! He's only worth about two hundred thousand. 'Steve,' he said, just like that, 'if I had your brains' "—He would continue in this way with moody self-satisfaction, painting a picture of future success when all who scorned him now would flock to his standard.

"Oh, yes," said he, "they'll all be mighty anxious then to shake Little Stevie's hand."

Gant, in a fury, gave him a hard beating when he had been expelled from school. He had never forgotten. Finally, he was told to go to work and support himself: he found desultory employment as a soda-jerker, or as delivery boy for a morning paper. Once, with a crony, Gus Moody, son of a foundry-man, he had gone off to see the world. Grimy from vagabondage they had crawled off a freight-train at Knoxville, Tennessee, spent their little money on food, and in a brothel, and returned, two days later, coal-black but boastful of their exploit.

"I'll vow," Eliza fretted, "I don't know what's to become of that boy." It was the tragic flaw of her temperament to get to the vital point too late: she pursed her lips thoughtfully, wandered off in another direction, and wept when misfortune came. She always waited. Moreover, in her deepest heart, she had an affection for her oldest son, which, if it was not greater, was at least different in kind from what she bore for the others. His glib boastfulness, his pitiable brag, pleased her: they were to her indications of his "smartness," and she often infuriated her two studious girls by praising them. Thus, looking at a specimen of his handwriting, she would say:

"There's one thing sure: he writes a better hand than any of the rest of you, for all your schooling."

Steve had early tasted the joys of the bottle, stealing, during the days when he was a young attendant of his father's debauch, a furtive swallow from the strong rank whisky in a half-filled flask: the taste nauseated him, but the experience made good boasting for his fellows.

At fifteen, he had found, while smoking cigarettes with Gus Moody, in a neighbor's barn, a bottle wrapped in an oats sack by the worthy citizen, against the too sharp examination of his wife. When the man had come for secret potation some time later, and found his bottle half-empty, he had grimly dosed the remainder with Croton oil: the two boys were nauseously sick for several days.

One day, Steve forged a check on his father. It was some days before Gant discovered it: the amount was only three dollars, but his anger was bitter. In a pronouncement at home, delivered loudly enough to publish the boy's offense to the neighborhood, he spoke of the penitentiary, of letting him go to jail, of being disgraced in his old age—a period of his life at which he had not yet arrived, but which he used to his advantage in times of strife.

He paid the check, of course, but another name—that of "forger"—was added to the vocabulary of his abuse. Steve sneaked in and out of the house, eating his meals alone for several days. When he met his father little was said by either: behind the hard angry glaze of their eyes, they both looked depthlessly into each other; they knew that they could withhold nothing from each other, that the same sores festered in each, the same hungers and desires, the same crawling appetites polluted their blood. And knowing this, something in each of them turned away in grievous shame.

Gant added this to his tirades against Eliza; all that was bad in the boy his mother had given him.

"Mountain Blood! Mountain Blood!" he yelled. "He's Greeley Pentland all over again. Mark my words," he continued, after striding feverishly about the house, muttering to himself and bursting finally into the kitchen, "mark my words, he'll wind up in the penitentiary."

And, her nose reddened by the spitting grease, she would purse her lips, saying little, save, when goaded, to make some return calculated to infuriate and antagonize him.

"Well, maybe if he hadn't been sent to every dive in town to pull his daddy out, he would turn out better."

"You lie, Woman! By God, you lie!" he thundered magnificently but illogically.

Gant drank less: save for a terrifying spree every six or eight weeks, which bound them all in fear for two or three days, Eliza had little to complain of on this score. But her enormous patience was wearing very thin because of the daily cycle of abuse. They slept now in separate rooms upstairs: he rose at six or six-thirty, dressed and went down to build the fires. As he kindled a blaze in the range, and a roaring fire in the sitting-room, he muttered constantly to himself, with an occasional oratorical rise and fall of his voice. In this way he composed and polished the flood of his invective: when the demands of fluency and emphasis had been satisfied he would appear suddenly before her in the kitchen, and deliver himself without preliminary, as the grocer's negro entered with pork chops or a thick steak:

"Woman, would you have had a roof to shelter you to-day if it hadn't been for me? Could you have depended on your worthless old father, Tom Pentland, to give you one? Would Brother Will, or Brother Jim give you one? Did you ever hear of them giving any one anything? Did you ever hear of them caring for anything but their own miserable hides? *Did* you? Would any of them give a starving beggar a crust of bread? By

God, no! Not even if he ran a bakery shop! Ah me! 'Twas a bitter day for me when I first came into this accursed country: little did I know what it would lead to. Mountain Grills! Mountain Grills!" and the tide would reach its height.

At times, when she tried to reply to his attack, she would burst easily into tears. This pleased him: he liked to see her cry. But usually she made an occasional nagging retort: deep down, between their blind antagonistic souls, an ugly and desperate war was being waged. Yet, had he known to what lengths these daily assaults might drive her, he would have been astounded: they were part of the deep and feverish discontent of his spirit, the rooted instinct to have an object for his abuse.

Moreover, his own feeling for order was so great that he had a passionate aversion for what was slovenly, disorderly, diffuse. He was goaded to actual fury at times when he saw how carefully she saved bits of old string, empty cans and bottles, paper, trash of every description: the mania for acquisition, as yet an undeveloped madness in Eliza, enraged him.

"In God's name!" he would cry with genuine anger. "In God's name! Why don't you get rid of some of this junk?" And he would move destructively toward it.

"No you don't, Mr. Gant!" she would answer sharply. "You never know when those things will come in handy."

It was, perhaps, a reversal of custom that the deep-hungering spirit of quest belonged to the one with the greatest love of order, the most pious regard for ritual, who wove into a pattern even his daily tirades of abuse, and that the sprawling blot of chaos, animated by one all-mastering desire for possession, belonged to the practical, the daily person.

Gant had the passion of the true wanderer, of him who wanders from a fixed point. He needed the order and the dependence of a home—he was intensely a family man: their clustered warmth and strength about him was life. After his punctual morning tirade at Eliza, he went about the rousing of the slumbering children. Comically, he could not endure feeling, in the morning, that he was the only one awake and about.

His waking cry, delivered by formula, with huge comic gruffness from the foot of the stairs, took this form:

"Steve! Ben! Grover! Luke! You damned scoundrels! get up! In God's name, what will become of you! You'll never amount to anything as long as you live."

He would continue to roar at them from below as if they were wakefully attentive above.

"When I was your age, I had milked four cows, done all the chores, and walked eight miles through the snow by this time."

Indeed, when he described his early schooling, he furnished a landscape that was constantly three feet deep in snow, and frozen hard. He seemed never to have attended school save under polar conditions.

And fifteen minutes later, he would roar again: "You'll never amount to anything, you good-for-nothing bums! If one side of the wall caved in, you'd roll over to the other."

Presently now there would be the rapid thud of feet upstairs, and one by one they would descend, rushing naked into the sitting-room with their clothing bundled in their arms. Before his roaring fire they would dress.

By breakfast, save for sporadic laments, Gant was in something approaching good humor. They fed hugely: he stoked their plates for them with great slabs of fried steak, grits fried in egg, hot biscuits, jam, fried apples. He departed for his shop about the time the boys, their throats still convulsively swallowing hot food and coffee, rushed from the house at the warning signal of the mellow-tolling final nine-o'clock school bell.

He returned for lunch—dinner, as they called it—briefly garrulous with the morning's news; in the evening, as the family gathered in again, he returned, built his great fire, and launched his supreme invective, a ceremony which required a half hour in composition, and another three-quarters, with repetition and additions, in delivery. They dined then quite happily.

So passed the winter. Eugene was three; they bought him alphabet books, and animal pictures, with rhymed fables below. Gant read them to him indefatigably: in six weeks he knew them all by memory.

Through the late winter and spring he performed numberless times for the neighbors: holding the book in his hands he pretended to read what he knew by heart. Gant was delighted:

he abetted the deception. Every one thought it extraordinary that a child should read so young.

In the Spring Gant began to drink again; his thirst withered, however, in two or three weeks, and shamefacedly he took up the routine of his life. But Eliza was preparing for a change.

It was 1904; there was in preparation a great world's exposition at Saint Louis: it was to be the visual history of civilization, bigger, better, and greater than anything of its kind ever known before. Many of the Altamont people intended to go: Eliza was fascinated at the prospect of combining travel with profit.

"Do you know what?" she began thoughtfully one night, as she laid down the paper, "I've a good notion to pack up and go."

"Go? Go where?"

"To Saint Louis," she answered. "Why, say—if things work out all right, we might simply pull out and settle down there." She knew that the suggestion of a total disruption of the established life, a voyage to new lands, a new quest of fortune fascinated him. It had been talked of years before when he had broken his partnership with Will Pentland.

"What do you intend to do out there? How are the children going to get along?"

"Why, sir," she began smugly, pursing her lips thoughtfully, and smiling cunningly, "I'll simply get me a good big house and drum up a trade among the Altamont people who are going."

"Merciful God, Mrs. Gant!" he howled tragically, "you surely wouldn't do a thing like that. I beg you not to."

"Why, pshaw, Mr. Gant, don't be such a fool. There's nothing wrong in keeping boarders. Some of the most respectable people in this town do it." She knew what a tender thing his pride was: he could not bear to be thought incapable of the support of his family—one of his most frequent boasts was that he was "a good provider." Further, the residence of any one under his roof not of his blood and bone sowed the air about with menace, breached his castle walls. Finally, he had a particular revulsion against lodgers: to earn one's living by accepting the contempt, the scorn, and the money of what he called "cheap boarders" was an almost unendurable ignominy.

She knew this but she could not understand his feeling. Not merely to possess property, but to draw income from it was part of the religion of her family, and she surpassed them all by her willingness to rent out a part of her home. She alone, in fact, of all the Pentlands was willing to relinquish the little moated castle of home; the particular secrecy and privacy of their walls she alone did not seem to value greatly. And she was the only one of them that wore a skirt.

Eugene had been fed from her breast until he was more than three years old: during the winter he was weaned. Something in her stopped; something began.

She had her way finally. Sometimes she would talk to Gant thoughtfully and persuasively about the World's Fair venture. Sometimes, during his evening tirades, she would snap back at him using the project as a threat. Just what was to be achieved she did not know. But she felt it was a beginning for her. And she had her way finally.

Gant succumbed to the lure of new lands. He was to remain at home: if all went well he would come out later. The prospect, too, of release for a time excited him. Something of the old thrill of youth touched him. He was left behind, but the world lurked full of unseen shadows for a lonely man. Daisy was in her last year at school: she stayed with him. But it cost him more than a pang or two to see Helen go. She was almost fourteen.

In early April, Eliza departed, bearing her excited brood about her, and carrying Eugene in her arms. He was bewildered at this rapid commotion, but he was electric with curiosity and activity.

The Tarkintons and Duncan streamed in: there were tears and kisses. Mrs. Tarkinton regarded her with some awe. The whole neighborhood was a bit bewildered at this latest turn.

"Well, well,—you never can tell," said Eliza, smiling tearfully and enjoying the sensation she had provided. "If things go well we may settle down out there."

"You'll come back," said Mrs. Tarkinton with cheerful loyalty. "There's no place like Altamont."

They went to the station in the street-car: Ben and Grover gleefully sat together, guarding a big luncheon hamper. Helen clutched nervously a bundle of packages. Eliza glanced sharply at her long straight legs and thought of the half-fare.

"Say," she began, laughing indefinitely behind her hand, and nudging Gant, "she'll have to scrooch up, won't she? They'll think you're mighty big to be under twelve." she went on, addressing the girl directly.

Helen stirred nervously.

"We shouldn't have done that," Gant muttered.

"Pshaw!" said Eliza, "No one will ever notice her."

He saw them into the train, disposed comfortably by the solicitous Pullman porter.

"Keep your eye on them, George," he said, and gave the man a coin. Eliza eyed it jealously.

He kissed them all roughly with his mustache, but he patted his little girl's bony shoulders with his great hand, and hugged her to him. Something stabbed sharply in Eliza.

They had an awkward moment. The strangeness, the absurdity of the whole project, and the monstrous fumbling of all life, held them speechless.

"Well," he began, "I reckon you know what you're doing."

"Well, I tell you," she said, pursing her lips, and looking out the window, "you don't know what may come out of this."

He was vaguely appeased. The train jerked, and moved off slowly. He kissed her clumsily.

"Let me know as soon as you get there," he said, and he strode swiftly down the aisle.

"Good-by, good-by," cried Eliza, waving Eugene's small hand at the long figure on the platform. "Children," she said, "wave good-by to your papa." They all crowded to the window. Eliza wept.

Eugene watched the sun wane and redden on a rocky river, and on the painted rocks of Tennessee gorges: the enchanted river wound into his child's mind forever. Years later, it was to be remembered in dreams tenanted with elvish and mysterious beauty. Stilled in great wonder, he went to sleep to the rhythmical pounding of the heavy wheels.

They lived in a white house on the corner. There was a small plot of lawn in front, and a narrow strip on the side next to the pavement. He realized vaguely that it was far from the great central web and roar of the city—he thought he heard some one say four or five miles. Where was the river?

Two little boys, twins, with straight very blond heads, and thin, mean faces, raced up and down the sidewalk before the house incessantly on tricycles. They wore white sailor-suits, with blue collars, and he hated them very much. He felt vaguely that their father was a bad man who had fallen down an elevator shaft, breaking his legs.

The house had a back yard, completely enclosed by a red board fence. At the end was a red barn. Years later, Steve, returning home, said: "That section's all built up out there now." Where?

One day in the hot barren back yard, two cots and mattresses had been set up for airing. He lay upon one luxuriously, breathing the hot mattress, and drawing his small legs up lazily. Luke lay upon the other. They were eating peaches.

A fly grew sticky on Eugene's peach. He swallowed it. Luke howled with laughter.

"Swallowed a fly! Swallowed a fly!"

He grew violently sick, vomited, and was unable to eat for some time. He wondered why he had swallowed the fly when he had seen it all the time.

The summer came down blazing hot. Gant arrived for a few days, bringing Daisy with him. One night they drank beer at the Delmar Gardens. In the hot air, at a little table, he gazed thirstily at the beaded foaming stein: he would thrust his face, he thought, in that chill foam and drink deep of happiness. Eliza gave him a taste; they all shrieked at his bitter surprised face.

Years later he remembered Gant, his mustache flecked with foam, quaffing mightily at the glass: the magnificent gusto, the beautiful thirst inspired in him the desire for emulation, and he wondered if all beer were bitter, if there were not a period of initiation into the pleasures of this great beverage.

Faces from the old half-forgotten world floated in from time to time. Some of the Altamont people came and stayed at

Eliza's house. One day, with sudden recollective horror he looked up into the brutal shaven face of Jim Lyda. He was the Altamont sheriff; he lived at the foot of the hill below Gant. Once, when Eugene was past two, Eliza had gone to Piedmont as witness in a trial. She was away two days; he was left in care of Mrs. Lyda. He had never forgotten Lyda's playful cruelty the first night.

Now, one day, this monster appeared again, by devilish sleight, and Eugene looked up into the heavy evil of his face. Eugene saw Eliza standing near Jim; and as the terror in the small face grew, Jim made as if to put his hand violently upon her. At his cry of rage and fear, they both laughed: for a blind moment or two Eugene for the first time hated her: he was mad, impotent with jealousy and fear.

At night the boys, Steve, Ben, and Grover, who had been sent out at once to seek employment by Eliza, returned from the Fair Grounds, chattering with the lively excitement of the day's bustle. Sniggering furtively, they talked suggestively about the Hoochy-Koochy: Eugene understood it was a dance. Steve hummed a monotonous, suggestive tune, and writhed sensually. They sang a song; the plaintive distant music haunted him. He learned it:

"Meet me in Saint—Lou—iss, Loo—ee,
Meet me at the Fair,
If you see the boys and girlies,
Tell them I'll be there.
We will dance the Hoochy-Koochy—"

and so on.

Sometimes, lying on a sunny quilt, Eugene grew conscious of a gentle peering face, a soft caressing voice, unlike any of the others in kind and quality, a tender olive skin, black hair, sloe-black eyes, exquisite, rather sad, kindliness. He nuzzled his soft face next to Eugene's, fondled and embraced him. On his brown neck he was birth-marked with a raspberry: Eugene touched it again and again with wonder. This was Grover—the gentlest and saddest of the boys.

Eliza sometimes allowed them to take him on excursions.

Once, they made a voyage on a river steamer: he went below and from the side-openings looked closely upon the powerful yellow snake, coiling slowly and resistlessly past.

The boys worked on the Fair Grounds. They were call-boys at a place called the Inside Inn. The name charmed him: it flashed constantly through his brain. Sometimes his sisters, sometimes Eliza, sometimes the boys pulled him through the milling jungle of noise and figures, past the rich opulence and variety of the life of the Fair. He was drugged in phantasy as they passed the East India tea-house, and as he saw tall turbaned men who walked about within and caught for the first time, so that he never forgot, the slow incense of the East. Once in a huge building roaring with sound, he was rooted before a mighty locomotive, the greatest monster he had ever seen, whose wheels spun terrifically in grooves, whose blazing furnaces, raining hot red coals into the pit beneath, were fed incessantly by two grimed fire-painted stokers. The scene burned in his brain like some huge splendor out of Hell: he was appalled and fascinated by it.

Again, he stood at the edge of the slow, terrific orbit of the Ferris Wheel, reeled down the blaring confusion of the midway, felt his staggering mind converge helplessly into all the mad phantasmagoria of the carnival; he heard Luke's wild story of the snake-eater, and shrieked in agony when they threatened to take him in.

Once Daisy, yielding to the furtive cat-cruelty below her mild placidity, took him with her through the insane horrors of the scenic railway; they plunged bottomlessly from light into roaring blackness, and as his first yell ceased with a slackening of the car, rolled gently into a monstrous lighted gloom peopled with huge painted grotesques, the red maws of fiendish heads, the cunning appearances of death, nightmare, and madness. His unprepared mind was unrooted by insane fear: the car rolled downward from one lighted cavern to another, and as his heart withered to a pea, he heard from the people about him loud gusty laughter, in which his sister joined. His mind, just emerging from the unreal wilderness of childish fancy, gave way completely in this Fair, and he was paralyzed by the conviction, which often returned to him in later years, that his life was a fabulous nightmare and that, by cunning and conspirate artifice, he had surrendered all his hope, belief, and confidence to the lewd torture of demons masked in human flesh. Half-sensible, and purple with gasping terror, he came out finally into the warm and practical sunlight.

His last remembrance of the Fair came from a night in early autumn: with Daisy again he sat upon the driver's seat of a motor bus, listening for the first time to the wonder of its labored chugging, as they rolled, through ploughing sheets of rain, around the gleaming roads, and by the Cascades, pouring their water down before a white building jewelled with ten thousand lights.

The summer had passed. There was the rustling of autumn winds, a whispering breath of departed revelry: carnival was almost done.

And now the house grew very still: he saw his mother very little, he did not leave the house, he was in the care of his sisters, and he was constantly admonished to silence.

One day Gant came back a second time. Grover was down with typhoid.

"He said he ate a pear at the Fair grounds," Eliza repeated the story for the hundredth time. "He came home and complained of feeling sick. I put my hand on his head and he was burning up. 'Why, child,' I said, 'what on earth——?' "

Her black eyes brightened in her white face: she was afraid. She pursed her lips and spoke hopefully.

"Hello, son," said Gant casually, entering the room; his heart shrivelled as he saw the boy.

Eliza pursed her lips more and more thoughtfully after each visit the doctor made; she seized every spare crumb of encouragement and magnified it, but her heart was sick. Then one night, tearing away the mask suddenly, she came swiftly from the boy's room.

"Mr. Gant," she said in a whisper, pursing her lips. She shook her white face at him silently as if unable to speak. Then, rapidly, she concluded: "He's gone, he's gone, he's gone!"

Eugene was deep in midnight slumber. Some one shook him, loosening him slowly from his drowsiness. Presently he found himself in the arms of Helen, who sat on the bed holding him, her morbid, stricken little face fastened on him. She spoke to him distinctly and slowly in a subdued voice, charged somehow with a terrible eagerness:

"Do you want to see Grover?" she whispered. "He's on the cooling board."

He wondered what a cooling board was; the house was full of menace. She bore him out into the dimly lighted hall, and carried him to the room at the front of the house. Behind the door he heard low voices. Quietly she opened it; the light blazed brightly on the bed. Eugene looked, horror swarmed like poison through his blood. Behind the little wasted shell that lay there he remembered suddenly the warm brown face, the soft eyes, that once had peered down at him: like one who has been mad, and suddenly recovers reason, he remembered that forgotten face he had not seen in weeks, that strange bright loneliness that would not return. O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.

Eliza sat heavily on a chair, her face bent sideways on her rested hand. She was weeping, her face contorted by the comical and ugly grimace that is far more terrible than any quiet beatitude of sorrow. Gant comforted her awkwardly but, looking at the boy from time to time, he went out into the hall and cast his arms forth in agony, in bewilderment.

The undertakers put the body in a basket and took it away.

"He was just twelve years and twenty days old," said Eliza over and over, and this fact seemed to trouble her more than any other.

"You children go and get some sleep now," she commanded suddenly and, as she spoke, her eye fell on Ben who stood puzzled and scowling, gazing in with his curious old-man's look. She thought of the severance of the twins; they had entered life within twenty minutes of each other; her heart was gripped with pity at the thought of the boy's loneliness. She wept anew. The children went to bed. For some time Eliza and Gant continued to sit alone in the room. Gant leaned his face in his powerful hands. "The best boy I had," he muttered. "By God, he was the best of the lot."

And in the ticking silence they recalled him, and in the heart of each was fear and remorse, because he had been a quiet boy, and there were many, and he had gone unnoticed.

"I'll never be able to forget his birthmark," Eliza whispered. "Never, never."

Then presently each thought of the other; they felt suddenly the horror and strangeness of their surroundings. They thought of the vine-wound house in the distant mountains, of the roaring fires, the tumult, the cursing, the pain, of their blind and tangled lives, and of blundering destiny which brought them here now in this distant place, with death, after the carnival's close.

Eliza wondered why she had come: she sought back through the hot and desperate mazes for the answer:

"If I had known," she began presently, "if I had known how it would turn out——"

"Never mind," he said, and he stroked her awkwardly. "By God!" he added dumbly after a moment. "It's pretty strange when you come to think about it."

And as they sat there more quietly now, swarming pity rose in them—not for themselves, but for each other, and for the waste, the confusion, the groping accident of life.

Gant thought briefly of his four and fifty years, his vanished youth, his diminishing strength, the ugliness and badness of so much of it; and he had the very quiet despair of a man who knows the forged chain may not be unlinked, the threaded design unwound, the done undone.

"If I had known. If I had known," said Eliza. And then: "I'm sorry." But he knew that her sorrow at that moment was not for him or for herself, or even for the boy whom idiot chance had thrust in the way of pestilence, but that, with a sudden inner flaming of her clairvoyant Scotch soul, she had looked cleanly, without pretense for the first time, upon the inexorable tides of Necessity, and that she was sorry for all who had lived, were living, or would live, fanning with their prayers the useless altar flames, suppliant with their hopes to an unwitting spirit, casting the tiny rockets of their belief against remote eternity, and hoping for grace, guidance, and delivery upon the spinning and forgotten cinder of this earth. O lost.

They went home immediately. At every station Gant and Eliza made restless expeditions to the baggage-car. It was gray autumnal November: the mountain forests were quilted with dry brown leaves. They blew about the streets of Altamont, they were deep in lane and gutter, they scampered dryly along before the wind.

The car ground noisily around the curve at the hill-top. The Gants descended: the body had already been sent on from the station. As Eliza came slowly down the hill, Mrs. Tarkinton ran from her house sobbing. Her eldest daughter had died a month before. The two women gave loud cries as they saw each other, and rushed together.

In Gant's parlor, the coffin had already been placed on trestles, the neighbors, funeral-faced and whispering, were assembled to greet them. That was all.

VI

The death of Grover gave Eliza the most terrible wound of her life: her courage was snapped, her slow but powerful adventure toward freedom was abruptly stopped. Her flesh seemed to turn rotten when she thought of the distant city and the Fair: she was appalled before the hidden adversary who had struck her down.

With desperate sadness she encysted herself within her house and her family, reclaimed that life she had been ready to renounce, lived laborious days and tried to drink, in toil, oblivion. But the dark lost face gleamed like a sudden and impalpable faun within the thickets of memory: she thought of the mark on his brown neck and wept.

During the grim winter the shadows lifted slowly. Gant brought back the roaring fires, the groaning succulent table, the lavish and explosive ritual of the daily life. The old gusto surged back in their lives.

And, as the winter waned, the interspersed darkness in Eugene's brain was lifted slowly, days, weeks, months began to emerge in consecutive brightness; his mind came from the confusion of the Fair: life opened practically.

Secure and conscious now in the guarded and sufficient strength of home, he lay with well-lined belly before the roasting vitality of the fire, poring insatiably over great volumes in the bookcase, exulting in the musty odor of the leaves, and in the pungent smell of their hot hides. The books he delighted in most were three huge calf-skin volumes called *Ridpath's History of the World.* Their numberless pages were illustrated with hundreds of drawings, engravings, wood-cuts: he followed the progression of the centuries pictorially before he could read. The pictures of battle delighted him most of all. Exulting in the howl of the beaten wind about the house, the thunder of great trees, he committed himself to the dark storm, releasing the mad devil's hunger all men have in them, which lusts for darkness, the wind, and incalculable speed. The past unrolled to him in separate and enormous visions; he built unending legends upon the pictures of the kings of Egypt, charioted swiftly by soaring horses, and something infinitely old and recollective seemed to awaken in him as he looked on fabulous monsters, the twined beards and huge beast-bodies of Assyrian kings, the walls of Babylon. His brain swarmed with pictures—Cyrus directing the charge, the spear-forest of the Macedonian phalanx, the splintered oars, the numberless huddle of the ships at Salamis, the feasts of Alexander, the terrific melée of the knights, the shattered lances, the axe and the sword, the massed pikemen, the beleaguered walls, the scaling ladders heavy with climbing men hurled backward, the Swiss who flung his body on the lances, the press of horse and foot, the gloomy forests of Gaul and Cæsarean conquests. Gant sat farther away, behind him, swinging violently back and forth in a stout rocker, spitting clean and powerful spurts of tobacco-juice over his son's head into the hissing fire.

Or again, Gant would read to him with sonorous and florid rhetoric passages from Shakespeare, among which he heard most often Marc Antony's funeral oration, Hamlet's soliloquy, the banquet scene in Macbeth, and the scene between Desdemona and Othello before he strangles her. Or, he would recite or read poetry, for which he had a capacious and retentive memory. His favorites were: "O why should the spirit of mortal be proud" ("Lincoln's favorite poem," he was fond of saying); "'We are lost,' the captain shouted, As he staggered down the stairs"; "I remember, I remember, the house where I was born", "Ninety and nine with their captain, Rode on the enemy's track, Rode in the gray light of morning, Nine of the ninety came back"; "The boy stood on the burning deck"; and "Half a league, half a league, half a league onward."

Sometimes he would get Helen to recite "Still sits the schoolhouse by the road, a ragged beggar sunning; Around it still the sumachs grow, and blackberry vines are running."

And when she had told how grasses had been growing over the girl's head for forty years, and how the gray-haired man had found in life's harsh school how few hated to go above him, because, you see, they love him, Gant would sigh heavily, and say with a shake of his head:

"Ah me! There was never a truer word spoken than that."

The family was at the very core and ripeness of its life together. Gant lavished upon it his abuse, his affection, and his prodigal provisioning. They came to look forward eagerly to his entrance, for he brought with him the great gusto of living, of ritual. They would watch him in the evening as he turned the corner below with eager strides, follow carefully the processional of his movements from the time he flung his provisions upon the kitchen table to the re-kindling of his fire, with which he was always at odds when he entered, and on to which he poured wood, coal and kerosene lavishly. This done, he would remove his coat and wash himself at the basin vigorously, rubbing his great hands across his shaven, tough-bearded face with the cleansing and male sound of sand-paper. Then he would thrust his body against the door jamb and scratch his back energetically by moving it violently to and fro. This done, he would empty another half can of kerosene on the howling flame, lunging savagely at it, and muttering to himself.

Then, biting off a good hunk of powerful apple tobacco, which lay ready to his use on the mantel, he would pace back and forth across his room fiercely, oblivious of his grinning family who followed these ceremonies with exultant excitement, as he composed his tirade. Finally, he would burst in on Eliza in the kitchen, plunging to the heart of denunciation with a mad howl.

His turbulent and undisciplined rhetoric had acquired, by the regular convention of its usage, something of the movement and directness of classical epithet: his similes were preposterous, created really in a spirit of vulgar mirth, and the great comic intelligence that was in the family—down to the youngest—was shaken daily by it. The children grew to await his return in the evening with a kind of exhilaration. Indeed, Eliza herself, healing slowly and painfully her great hurt, got a certain stimulation from it; but there was still in her a fear of the periods of drunkenness, and latently, a stubborn and unforgiving recollection of the past.

But, during that winter, as death, assaulted by the quick and healing gaiety of children, those absolute little gods of the moment, lifted itself slowly out of their hearts, something like hopefulness returned to her. They were a life unto themselves—how lonely they were they did not know, but they were known to every one and friended by almost no one. Their status was singular—if they could have been distinguished by caste, they would probably have been called middle-class, but the Duncans, the Tarkintons, all their neighbors, and all their acquaintances throughout the town, never drew in to them, never came into the strange rich color of their lives, because they had twisted the design of all orderly life, because there was in them a mad, original, disturbing quality which they did not suspect. And companionship with the elect—those like the Hilliards—was equally impossible, even if they had had the gift or the desire for it. But they hadn't.

Gant was a great man, and not a singular one, because singularity does not hold life in unyielding devotion to it.

As he stormed through the house, unleashing his gathered bolts, the children followed him joyously, shrieking exultantly as he told Eliza he had first seen her "wriggling around the corner like a snake on her belly," or, as coming in from freezing weather he had charged her and all the Pentlands with malevolent domination of the elements.

"We will freeze," he yelled, "we will freeze in this hellish, damnable, cruel and God-forsaken climate. Does Brother Will care? Does Brother Jim care? Did the Old Hog, your miserable old father, care? Merciful God! I have fallen into the hands of fiends incarnate, more savage, more cruel, more abominable than the beasts of the field. Hellhounds that they are, they will sit by and gloat at my agony until I am done to death."

He paced rapidly about the adjacent wash-room for a moment, muttering to himself, while grinning Luke stood watchfully near.

"But they can eat!" he shouted, plunging suddenly at the kitchen door. "They can eat—when some one else will feed them. I shall never forget the Old Hog as long as I live. Cr-unch, Cr-unch, Cr-unch,"—they were all exploded with laughter as his face assumed an expression of insane gluttony, and as he continued, in a slow, whining voice intended to represent the speech of the late Major: "'Eliza, if you don't mind I'll have some more of that chicken,' when the old scoundrel had shovelled it down his throat so fast we had to carry him away from the table."

As his denunciation reached some high extravagance the boys would squeal with laughter, and Gant, inwardly tickled, would glance around slyly with a faint grin bending the corners of his thin mouth. Eliza herself would laugh shortly, and then exclaim roughly: "Get out of here! I've had enough of your goings-on for one night."

Sometimes, on these occasions, his good humor grew so victorious that he would attempt clumsily to fondle her, putting one arm stiffly around her waist, while she bridled, became confused, and half-attempted to escape, saying: "Get away! Get away from me! It's too late for that now." Her white embarrassed smile was at once painful and comic: tears pressed closely behind it. At these rare, unnatural exhibitions of affection, the children laughed with constraint, fidgeted restlessly, and said: "Aw, papa, don't."

Eugene, when he first noticed an occurrence of this sort, was getting on to his fifth year: shame gathered in him in tangled clots, aching in his throat; he twisted his neck about convulsively, smiling desperately as he did later when he saw poor buffoons or mawkish scenes in the theatre. And he was never after able to see them touch each other with affection, without the same inchoate and choking humiliation: they were so used to the curse, the clamor, and the roughness, that any variation into tenderness came as a cruel affectation.

But as the slow months, gummed with sorrow, dropped more clearly, the powerful germinal instinct for property and freedom began to re-awaken in Eliza, and the ancient submerged struggle between their natures began again. The children were growing up—Eugene had found playmates—Harry Tarkinton and Max Isaacs. Her sex was a fading coal.

Season by season, there began again the old strife of ownership and taxes. Returning home, with the tax-collector's report in his hand, Gant would be genuinely frantic with rage.

"In the name of God, Woman, what are we coming to? Before another year we'll all go to the poorhouse. Ah, Lord! I see very well where it will all end. I'll go to the wall, every penny we've got will go into the pockets of those accursed swindlers, and the rest will come under the sheriff's hammer. I curse the day I was ever fool enough to buy the first stick. Mark my words, we'll be living in soup-kitchens before this fearful, this awful, this hellish and damnable winter is finished."

She would purse her lips thoughtfully as she went over the list, while he looked at her with a face of strained agony.

"Yes, it does look pretty bad," she would remark. And then: "It's a pity you didn't listen to me last summer, Mr. Gant, when we had a chance of trading in that worthless old Owenby place for those two houses on Carter Street. We could have been getting forty dollars a month rent on them ever since."

"I never want to own another foot of land as long as I live," he yelled. "It's kept me a poor man all my life, and when I die they'll have to give me six feet of earth in Pauper's Field." And he would grow broodingly philosophic, speaking of the vanity of human effort, the last resting-place in earth of rich and poor, the significant fact that we could "take none of it with us," ending perhaps with "Ah me! It all comes to the same in the end, anyway."

Or, he would quote a few stanzas of Gray's *Elegy,* using that encyclopædia of stock melancholy with rather indefinite application:

"—Await alike th' inevitable hour,
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

But Eliza sat grimly on what they had.

Gant, for all his hatred of land ownership, was proud of living under his own shelter, and indeed proud in the possession of anything that was sanctified by his usage, and that gave him comfort. He would have liked ready and unencumbered affluence—the possession of huge sums of money in the bank and in his pocket, the freedom to travel grandly, to go before the world spaciously. He liked to carry large sums of money in his pocket, a practice of which Eliza disapproved, and for which she reprimanded him frequently. Once or twice, when he was drunk, he had been robbed: he would brandish a roll of bills about under the stimulation of whisky, and dispense large sums to his children—ten, twenty, fifty dollars to each, with maudlin injunctions to "take it all! Take it all, God damn it!" But next day he was equally assiduous in his demands for its return· Helen usually collected it from the sometimes unwilling fingers of the boys. She would give it to him next day. She was fifteen or sixteen years old, and almost six feet high: a tall thin girl, with large hands and feet, big-boned, generous features, behind which the hysteria of constant excitement lurked.

The bond between the girl and her father grew stronger every day: she was nervous, intense, irritable, and abusive as he was. She adored him. He had begun to suspect that this devotion, and his own response to it, was a cause more and more of annoyance to Eliza, and he was inclined to exaggerate and emphasize it, particularly when he was drunk, when his furious distaste for his wife, his obscene complaint against her, was crudely balanced by his maudlin docility to the girl.

And Eliza's hurt was deeper because she knew that just at this time, when her slightest movement goaded him, did what was most rawly essential in him reveal itself. She was forced to keep out of his way, lock herself in her room, while her young daughter victoriously subdued him.

The friction between Helen and Eliza was often acute: they spoke sharply and curtly to each other, and were painfully aware of the other's presence in cramped quarters. And, in addition to the unspoken rivalry over Gant, the girl was in the same way, equally, rasped by the temperamental difference of Eliza—driven to fury at times by her slow, mouth-pursing speech, her placidity, the intonations of her voice, the deep abiding patience of her nature.

They fed stupendously. Eugene began to observe the food and the seasons. In the autumn, they barrelled huge frosty apples in the cellar. Gant bought whole hogs from the butcher, returning home early to salt them, wearing a long work-apron, and rolling his sleeves half up his lean hairy arms. Smoked bacons hung in the pantry, the great bins were full of flour, the dark recessed shelves groaned with preserved cherries, peaches, plums, quinces, apples, pears. All that he touched waxed in rich pungent life: his Spring gardens, wrought in the black wet earth below the fruit trees, flourished in huge crinkled lettuces that wrenched cleanly from the loamy soil with small black clots stuck to their crisp stocks; fat red radishes; heavy tomatoes. The rich plums lay bursted on the grass; his huge cherry trees oozed with heavy gum jewels; his apple trees bent with thick green clusters. The earth was spermy for him like a big woman.

Spring was full of cool dewy mornings, spurting winds, and storms of intoxicating blossoms, and in this enchantment Eugene first felt the mixed lonely ache and promise of the seasons.

In the morning they rose in a house pungent with breakfast cookery, and they sat at a smoking table loaded with brains and eggs, ham, hot biscuit, fried apples seething in their gummed syrups, honey, golden butter, fried steak, scalding coffee. Or there were stacked batter-cakes, rum-colored molasses, fragrant brown sausages, a bowl of wet cherries, plums, fat juicy bacon, jam. At the mid-day meal, they ate heavily: a huge hot roast of beef, fat buttered lima-beans, tender corn smoking on the cob, thick red slabs of sliced tomatoes, rough savory spinach, hot yellow corn-bread, flaky biscuits, a deep-dish peach and apple cobbler spiced with cinnamon, tender cabbage, deep glass dishes piled with preserved fruits—cherries, pears, peaches. At night they might eat fried steak, hot squares of grits fried in egg and butter, pork-chops, fish, young fried chicken.

For the Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts four heavy turkeys were bought and fattened for weeks: Eugene fed them with cans of shelled corn several times a day, but he could not bear to be present at their executions, because by that time their cheerful excited gobbles made echoes in his heart. Eliza baked for weeks in advance: the whole energy of the family focussed upon the great ritual of the feast. A day or two before, the auxiliary dainties arrived in piled grocer's boxes—the magic of strange foods and fruits was added to familiar fare: there were glossed sticky dates, cold rich figs, cramped belly to belly in small boxes, dusty raisins, mixed nuts—the almond, pecan, the meaty nigger-toe, the walnut, sacks of assorted candies, piles of yellow Florida oranges, tangerines, sharp, acrid, nostalgic odors.

Seated before a roast or a fowl, Gant began a heavy clangor on his steel and carving knife, distributing thereafter Gargantuan portions to each plate. Eugene feasted from a high chair by his father's side, filled his distending belly until it was drum-tight, and was permitted to stop eating by his watchful sire only when his stomach was impregnable to the heavy prod of Gant's big finger.

"There's a soft place there," he would roar, and he would cover the scoured plate of his infant son with another heavy slab of beef. That their machinery withstood this hammer-handed treatment was a tribute to their vitality and Eliza's cookery.

Gant ate ravenously and without caution. He was immoderately fond of fish, and he invariably choked upon a bone while eating it. This happened hundreds of times, but each time he would look up suddenly with a howl of agony and terror, groaning and crying out strongly while a half-dozen hands pounded violently on his back.

"Merciful God!" he would gasp finally, "I thought I was done for that time."

"I'll vow, Mr. Gant," Eliza was vexed. "Why on earth don't you watch what you're doing? If you didn't eat so fast you wouldn't always get choked."

The children, staring, but relieved, settled slowly back in their places.

He had a Dutch love of abundance: again and again he described the great stored barns, the groaning plenty of the Pennsylvanians.

On his journey to California, he had been charmed in New Orleans by the cheapness and profusion of tropical fruits: a peddler offered him a great bunch of bananas for twenty-five cents, and Gant had taken them at once, wondering desperately later, as they moved across the continent, why, and what he was going to do with them.

VII

This journey to California was Gant's last great voyage. He made it two years after Eliza's return from St. Louis, when he was fifty-six years old. In the great frame was already stirring the chemistry of pain and death. Unspoken and undefined there was in him the knowledge that he was at length caught in the trap of life and fixity, that he was being borne under in this struggle against the terrible will that wanted to own the earth more than to explore it. This was the final flare of the old hunger that had once darkened in the small gray eyes, leading a boy into new lands and toward the soft stone smile of an angel.

And he returned from nine thousand miles of wandering, to the bleak bare prison of the hills on a gray day late in winter.

In the more than eight thousand days and nights of this life with Eliza, how often had he been wakefully, soberly and peripatetically conscious of the world outside him between the hours of one and five A. M.? Wholly, for not more than nineteen nights—one for the birth of Leslie, Eliza's first daughter; one for her death twenty-six months later, cholera infantis; one for the death of Major Tom Pentland, Eliza's father, in May, 1902; one for the birth of Luke; one, on the train westbound to Saint Louis, en route to Grover's death; one for the death in the Playhouse (1893) of Uncle Thaddeus Evans, an aged and devoted negro; one, with Eliza, in the month of March, 1897, as deathwatch to the corpse of old Major Isaacs; three at the end of the month of July, 1897, when it was thought that Eliza, withered to a white sheeting of skin upon a bone frame, must die of typhoid; again in early April, 1903, for Luke, typhoid death near; one for the death of Greeley Pentland, aged twenty-six, congenital scrofulous tubercular, violinist, Pentlandian punster, petty check-forger, and six weeks' jailbird; three nights, from the eleventh to the fourteenth of January, 1905, by the rheumatic crucifixion of his right side, participant in his own grief, accuser of himself and his God; once in February, 1896, as deathwatch to the remains of Sandy Duncan, aged eleven; once in September, 1895, penitentially alert and shamefast in the City "calaboose"; in a room of the Keeley Institute at Piedmont, North Carolina, June 7, 1896; on March 17, 1906, between Knoxville, Tennessee, and Altamont, at the conclusion of a seven weeks' journey to California.

How looked the home-earth then to Gant the Far-Wanderer? Light crept grayly, melting on the rocky river, the engine smoke streaked out on dawn like a cold breath, the hills were big, but nearer, nearer than he thought. And Altamont lay gray and withered in the hills, a bleak mean wintry dot. He stepped carefully down in squalid Toytown, noting that everything was low, near, and shrunken as he made his Gulliverian entry. He had a roof-and-gulley high conviction; with careful tucked-in elbows he weighted down the heated Toytown street-car, staring painfully at the dirty pasteboard *pebbledash* of the Pisgah Hotel, the brick and board cheap warehouses of Depot Street, the rusty clapboard flimsiness of the Florence (Railway Men's) Hotel, quaking with beef-fed harlotry.

So small, so small, so small, he thought. I never believed it. Even the hills here. I'll soon be sixty.

His sallow face, thin-flanked, was hang-dog and afraid. He stared wistful-sullenly down at the rattan seat as the car screeched round into the switch at the cut and stopped; the motorman, smoke-throated, slid the door back and entered with his handle. He closed the door and sat down yawning.

"Where you been, Mr. Gant?"

"California," said Gant.

"Thought I hadn't seen you," said the motorman.

There was a warm electric smell and one of hot burnt steel.

But two months dead! But two months dead! Ah, Lord! So it's come to this. Merciful God, this fearful, awful, and damnable climate. Death, death! Is it too late? A land of life, a flower land. How clear the green clear sea was. And all the fishes swimming there. Santa Catalina. Those in the East should always go West. How came I here? Down, down—always down, did I know where? Baltimore, Sydney—In God's name, why? The little boat glass-bottomed, so you could look down. She lifted up her skirts as she stepped down. Where now? A pair of pippins.

"Jim Bowles died while you were gone, I reckon," said the motorman.

"What!" howled Gant. "Merciful God!" he clucked mournfully downward. "What did he die of?" he asked.

"Pneumonia," said the motorman. "He was dead four days after he was took down."

"Why, he was a big healthy man in the prime of life," said Gant. "I was talking to him the day before I went away," he lied, convincing himself permanently that this was true. "He looked as if he had never known a day's sickness in his life."

"He went home one Friday night with a chill," said the motorman, "and the next Tuesday he was gone."

There was a crescent humming on the rails. With his thick glove finger he pushed away a clearing in the window-coated ice scurf and looked smokily out on the raw red cut-bank. The other car appeared abruptly at the end of the cut and curved with a skreeking jerk into the switch.

"No, sir," said the motorman, sliding back the door, "you never know who'll go next. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. Hit gits the big 'uns first sometimes."

He closed the door behind him and jerkily opened three notches of juice. The car ground briskly off like a wound toy.

In the prime of life, thought Gant. Myself like that some day. No, for others. Mother almost eighty-six. Eats like a horse, Augusta wrote. Must send her twenty dollars. Now in the cold clay, frozen. Keep till Spring. Rain, rot, ruin. Who got the job? Brock or Saul Gudger? Bread out of my mouth. Do me to death—the stranger. Georgia marble, sandstone base, forty dollars.

"A gracious friend from us is gone,
A voice we loved is fled,
But faith and memory lead us on:
He lives; he is not dead."

Four cents a letter. Little enough, God knows, for the work you do. My letters the best. Could have been a writer. Like to draw too. And all of mine! I would have heard if anything —he would have told me. I'll never go that way. All right above the waist. If anything happens it will be down below. Eaten away. Whisky holes through all your guts. Pictures in Cardiac's office of man with cancer. But several doctors have to agree on it. Criminal offense if they don't. But, if worst comes to worst—all that's outside. Get it before it gets up in you. Still live. Old man Haight had a flap in his belly. Ladled it out in a cup. McGuire—damned butcher. But he can do anything. Cut off a piece here, sew it on there. Made the Hominy man a nose with a piece of shinbone. Couldn't tell it. Ought to be possible. Cut all the strings, tie them up again. While you wait. Sort of job for McGuire—rough and ready. They'll do it some day. After I'm gone. Things standing thus, unknown—but kill you maybe. Bull's too big. Soon now the Spring. You'd die. Not big enough. All bloody in her brain. Full filling fountains of bull-milk. Jupiter and what's-her-name.

But westward now he caught a glimpse of Pisgah and the western range. It was more spacious there. The hills climbed sunward to the sun. There was width to the eye, a smoking sun-hazed amplitude, the world convoluting and opening into the world, hill and plain, into the west. The West for desire, the East for home. To the east the short near mile-away hills reeked protectively above the town. Birdseye, Sunset. A straight plume of smoke coiled thickly from Judge Buck Sevier's smut-white clapboard residence on the decent side of Pisgah Avenue, thin smoke-wisps rose from the nigger shacks in the ravine below. Breakfast. Fried brains and eggs with streaky rashers of limp bacon. Wake, wake, wake, you mountain grills! Sleeps she yet, wrapped dirtily in three old wrappers in stale, airless yellow-shaded cold. The chapped hands sick-sweet glycerined. Gum-headed bottles, hairpins, and the bits of string. No one may enter now. Ashamed.

A paper-carrier, number 7, finished his route on the corner of Vine Street, as the car stopped, turned eastwards now from Pisgah Avenue toward the town core. The boy folded, bent, and flattened the fresh sheets deftly, throwing the block angularly thirty yards upon the porch of Shields the jeweller; it struck the boarding and bounded back with a fresh plop. Then he walked off with fatigued relief into time toward the twentieth century, feeling gratefully the ghost-kiss of absent weight upon his now free but still leaning right shoulder.

About fourteen, thought Gant. That would be Spring of 1864. The mule camp at Harrisburg. Thirty a month and keep. Men stank worse than mules. I was in third bunk on top. Gil in second. Keep your damned dirty hoof out of my mouth. It's bigger than a mule's. That was the man. If it ever lands on you, you bastard, you'll think it is a mule's, said Gil. Then they had it. Mother made us go. Big enough to work, she said. Born at the heart of the world, why here? Twelve miles from Gettysburg. Out of the South they came. Stove-pipe hats they had stolen. No shoes. Give me a drink, son. That was Fitzhugh Lee. After the third day we went over. Devil's Den. Cemetery Ridge. Stinking piles of arms and legs. Some of it done with meat-saws. Is the land richer now? The great barns bigger than the houses. Big eaters, all of us. I hid the cattle in the thicket. Belle Boyd, the Beautiful Rebel Spy. Sentenced to be shot four times. Took the despatches from his pocket while they danced. Probably a little chippie.

Hog-chitlins and hot cracklin' bread. Must get some. The whole hog or none. Always been a good provider. Little I ever had done for me.

The car still climbing, mounted the flimsy cheap-boarded brown-gray smuttiness of Skyland Avenue.

America's Switzerland. The Beautiful Land of the Sky. Jesus God! Old Bowman said he'll be a rich man some day. Built up all the way to Pasadena. Come on out. Too late now. Think he was in love with her. No matter. Too old. Wants her out there. No fool like—White bellies of the fish. A spring somewhere to wash me through. Clean as a baby once more. New Orleans, the night Jim Corbett knocked out John L. Sullivan. The man who tried to rob me. My clothes and my watch. Five blocks down Canal Street in my nightgown. Two A. M. Threw them all in a heap—watch landed on top. Fight in my room. Town full of crooks and pickpockets for prizefight. Make good story. Policeman half hour later. They come out and beg you to come in. Frenchwomen. Creoles. Beautiful Creole heiress. Steamboat race. Captain, they are gaining. I will not be beaten. Out of wood. Use the bacon she said proudly. There was a terrific explosion. He got her as she sank the third time and swam to shore. They powder in front of the window, smacking their lips at you. For old men better maybe. Who gets the business there? Bury them all above ground. Water two feet down. Rots them. Why not? All big jobs. Italy. Carrara and Rome. Yet Brutus is an hon-or-able man. What's a Creole? French and Spanish. Has she any nigger blood? Ask Cardiac?

The car paused briefly at the car-shed, in sight of its stabled brothers. Then it moved reluctantly past the dynamic atmosphere of the Power and Light Company, wheeling bluntly into the gray frozen ribbon of Hatton Avenue, running gently up hill nears its end into the frore silence of the Square.

Ah, Lord! Well do I remember. The old man offered me the whole piece for $1,000 three days after I arrived. Millionaire to-day if——

The car passed the Tuskegee on its eighty-yard climb into the Square. The fat slick worn leather-chairs marshalled between a fresh-rubbed gleaming line of brass spittoons squatted massively on each side of the entry door, before thick sheets of plate-glass that extended almost to the sidewalks with indecent nearness.

Many a fat man's rump upon the leather. Like fish in a glass case. Travelling man's wet chewed cigar, spit-limp on his greasy lips. Staring at all the women. Can't look back long. Gives advantage.

A negro bellboy sleepily wafted a gray dust-cloth across the leather. Within, before the replenished crackle-dance of the wood-fire, the night-clerk sprawled out in the deep receiving belly of a leather divan.

The car reached the Square, jolted across the netting of north-south lines, and came to a halt on the north side, facing east. Scurfing a patch away from the glazed window, Gant looked out. The Square in the wan-gray frozen morning walled round him with frozen unnatural smallness. He felt suddenly the cramped mean fixity of the Square: this was the one fixed spot in a world that writhed, evolved, and changed constantly in his vision, and he felt a sick green fear, a frozen constriction about his heart because the centre of his life now looked so shrunken. He got very definitely the impression that if he flung out his arms they would strike against the walls of the mean three-and-four-story brickbuilt buildings that flanked the Square raggedly.

Anchored to earth at last, he was hit suddenly by the whole cumulation of sight and movement, of eating, drinking, and acting that had gathered in him for two months. The limitless land, wood, field, hill, prairie, desert, mountain, the coast rushing away below his eyes, the ground that swam before his eyes at stations, the remembered ghosts of gumbo, oysters, huge Frisco seasteaks, tropical fruits swarmed with the infinite life, the ceaseless pullulation of the sea. Here only, in this unreal-reality, this unnatural vision of what he had known for twenty years, did life lose its movement, change, color.

The Square had the horrible concreteness of a dream. At the far southeastern edge he saw his shop: his name painted hugely in dirty scaly white across the brick near the roof: W. O. Gant—Marbles, Tombstones, Cemetery Fixtures. It was like a dream of hell, when a man finds his own name staring at him from the Devil's ledger; like a dream of death, when he who comes as mourner finds himself in the coffin, or as witness to a hanging, the condemned upon the scaffold.

A sleepy negro employed at the Manor Hotel clambered heavily up and slumped into one of the seats reserved for his race at the back. In a moment he began to snore gently through his blubbered lips.

At the east end of the Square, Big Bill Messler, with his vest half-unbuttoned over his girdled paunch-belly, descended slowly the steps of the City Hall, and moved soundingly off with country leisure along the cold-metallic sidewalk. The fountain, ringed with a thick bracelet of ice, played at quarter-strength a sheening glut of ice-blue water.

Cars droned separately into their focal positions; the carmen stamped their feet and talked smokily together; there was a breath of beginning life. Beside the City Hall, the firemen slept above their wagons: behind the bolted door great hoofs drummed woodenly.

A dray rattled across the east end of the Square before the City Hall, the old horse leaning back cautiously as he sloped down into the dray market by the oblique cobbled passage at the southeast that cut Gant's shop away from the market and "calaboose." As the car moved eastward again, Gant caught an angular view of Niggertown across this passage. The settlement was plumed delicately with a hundred tiny fumes of smoke.

The car sloped swiftly now down Academy Street, turned, as the upper edge of the negro settlement impinged steeply from the valley upon the white, into Ivy Street, and proceeded north along a street bordered on one side by smutty pebble-dash cottages, and on the other by a grove of lordly oaks, in which the large quaking plaster pile of old Professor Bowman's deserted School for Young Ladies loomed desolately, turning and stopping at the corner, at the top of the Woodson Street hill, by the great wintry, wooden, and deserted barn of the Ivy Hotel. It had never paid.

Gant kneed his heavy bag before him down the passage, depositing it for a moment at the curbing before he descended the hill. The unpaved frozen clay fell steeply and lumpily away. It was steeper, shorter, nearer than he thought. Only the trees looked large. He saw Duncan come out on his porch, shirtsleeved, and pick up the morning paper. Speak to him later. Too long now. As he expected, there was a fat coil of morning smoke above the Scotchman's chimney, but none from his own.

He went down the hill, opening his iron gate softly, and going around to the side entrance by the yard, rather than ascend the steep veranda steps. The grape vines, tough and barren, writhed about the house like sinewy ropes. He entered the sitting-room quietly. There was a strong odor of cold leather. Cold ashes were strewn thinly in the grate. He put his bag down and went back through the wash-room into the kitchen. Eliza, wearing one of his old coats, and a pair of fingerless woollen gloves, poked among the embers of a crawling little fire.

"Well, I'm back," Gant said.

"Why, what on earth!" she cried as he knew she would, becoming flustered and moving her arms indeterminately. He laid his hand clumsily on her shoulder for a moment. They stood awkwardly without movement. Then he seized the oil-can, and drenched the wood with kerosene. The flame roared up out of the stove.

"Mercy, Mr. Gant," cried Eliza, "you'll burn us up!"

But, seizing a handful of cut sticks and the oil-can, he lunged furiously toward the sitting-room.

As the flame shot roaring up from the oiled pine sticks, and he felt the fire-full chimney-throat tremble, he recovered joy. He brought back the width of the desert; the vast yellow serpent of the river, alluvial with the mined accretions of the continent; the rich vision of laden ships, masted above the sea-walls, the world-nostalgic ships, bearing about them the filtered and concentrated odors of the earth, sensual negroid rum and molasses, tar, ripening guavas, bananas, tangerines, pineapples in the warm holds of tropical boats, as cheap, as profuse, as abundant as the lazy equatorial earth and all its women; the great names of Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, California; the blasted fiend-world of the desert, and the terrific boles of trees, tunnelled for the passage of a coach; water that fell from a mountain-top in a smoking noiseless coil, internal boiling lakes flung skywards by the punctual respiration of the earth, the multitudinous torture in form of granite oceans, gouged depthlessly by canyons, and iridescent with the daily chameleon-shift beyond man, beyond nature, of terrific colors, below the un-human iridescence of the sky.

Eliza, still excited, recovering speech, followed him into the sitting-room, holding her chapped gloved hands clasped before her stomach while she talked.

"I was saying to Steve last night, 'It wouldn't surprise me if your papa would come rolling in at any minute now'—I just had a feeling, I don't know what you'd call it," she said, her face plucked inward by her sudden fabrication of legend, "but it's pretty strange when you come to think about it. I was in Garret's the other day ordering some things, some vanilla extract, soda and a pound of coffee when Aleck Carter came up to me. 'Eliza,' he said, 'when's Mr. Gant coming back—I think

I may have a job for him?' 'Why, Aleck,' I said, 'I don't much expect him before the first of April.' Well, sir, what do you know—I had no sooner got out on the street—I suppose I must have been thinking of something else, because I remember Emma Aldrich came by and hollered to me and I didn't think to answer her until she had gone on by, so I called out just as big as you please to her, 'Emma!'—the thing flashed over me all of a sudden—I was just as sure of it as I'm standing here—'what do you think? Mr. Gant's on his way back home.'"

Jesus God! thought Gant. It's begun again.

Her memory moved over the ocean-bed of event like a great octopus, blindly but completely feeling its way into every sea-cave, rill, and estuary, focussed on all she had done, felt and thought, with sucking Pentlandian intentness, for whom the sun shone, or grew dark, rain fell, and mankind came, spoke, and died, shifted for a moment in time out of its void into the Pentlandian core, pattern and heart of purpose.

Meanwhile, as he laid big gleaming lumps of coal upon the wood, he muttered to himself, his mind ordering in a mounting sequence, with balanced and climactic periods, his carefully punctuated rhetoric.

Yes, musty cotton, baled and piled under long sheds of railway sidings; and odorous pine woodlands of the level South, saturated with brown faery light, and broken by the tall straight leafless poles of trees; a woman's leg below an elegantly lifted skirt mounting to a carriage in Canal Street (French or Creole probably); a white arm curved reaching for a window shade, French-olive faces window-glimmering, the Georgia doctor's wife who slept above him going out, the unquenchable fish-filled abundance of the unfenced, blue, slow cat-slapping lazy Pacific; and the river, the all-drinking, yellow, slow-surging snake that drained the continent. His life was like that river, rich with its own deposited and onward-borne agglutinations, fecund with its sedimental accretions, filled exhaustlessly by life in order to be more richly itself, and this life, with the great purpose of a river, he emptied now into the harbor of his house, the sufficient haven of himself, for whom the gnarled vines wove round him thrice, the earth burgeoned with abundant fruit and blossom, the fire burnt madly.

"What have you got for breakfast?" he said to Eliza.

"Why," she said, pursing her lips meditatively, "would you like some eggs?"

"Yes," said he, "with a few rashers of bacon and a couple of pork sausages."

He strode across the dining-room and went up the hall.

"Steve! Ben! Luke! You damned scoundrels!" he yelled. "Get up!"

Their feet thudded almost simultaneously upon the floor.

"Papa's home!" they shrieked.

Mr. Duncan watched butter soak through a new-baked roll. He looked through his curtain angularly down, and saw thick acrid smoke biting heavily into the air above Gant's house.

"He's back," said he, with satisfaction.

So, at the moment looking, Tarkinton of the paints said: "W. O.'s back."

Thus came he home, who had put out to land westward, Gant the Far-Wanderer.

VIII

Eugene was loose now in the limitless meadows of sensation: his sensory equipment was so complete that at the moment of perception of a single thing, the whole background of color, warmth, odor, sound, taste established itself, so that later, the breath of hot dandelion brought back the grass-warm banks of Spring, a day, a place, the rustling of young leaves, or the page of a book, the thin exotic smell of tangerine, the wintry bite of great apples; or, as with *Gulliver's Travels,* a bright windy day in March, the spurting moments of warmth, the drip and reek of the earth-thaw, the feel of the fire.

He had won his first release from the fences of home—he was not quite six, when, of his own insistence, he went to school. Eliza did not want him to go, but his only close companion, Max Isaacs, a year his senior, was going, and there was in his heart a constricting terror that he would be left alone again. She told him he could not go: she felt, somehow, that school began the slow, the final loosening of the cords that held them together, but as she saw him slide craftily out the gate one morning in September and run at top speed to the corner where the other little boy was waiting, she did nothing to bring him back. Something taut snapped in her: she remembered his furtive backward glance, and she wept. And she did not weep for herself, but for him: the hour after his birth she had looked in his dark eyes and had seen something that would brood there eternally, she knew, unfathomable wells of remote and intangible loneliness: she knew that in her dark and sorrowful womb a stranger had come to life, fed by the lost communications of eternity, his own ghost, haunter of his own house, lonely to himself and to the world. O lost.

Busy with the ache of their own growing-pains, his brothers and sisters had little time for him: he was almost six years younger than Luke, the youngest of them, but they exerted over him the occasional small cruelties, petty tormentings by elder children of a younger, interested and excited by the brief screaming insanity of his temper when, goaded and taunted from some deep dream, he would seize a carving knife and pursue them, or batter his head against the walls.

They felt that he was "queer"—the other boys preached the smug cowardice of the child-herd, defending themselves, when their persecutions were discovered, by saying they would make a "real boy" of him. But there grew up in him a deep affection for Ben who stalked occasionally and softly through the house, guarding even then with scowling eyes, and surly speech, the secret life. Ben was a stranger: some deep instinct drew him to his child-brother, a portion of his small earnings as a paper-carrier he spent in gifts and amusement for Eugene, admonishing him sullenly, cuffing him occasionally, but defending him before the others.

Gant, as he watched his brooding face set for hours before a fire-lit book of pictures, concluded that the boy liked books, more vaguely, that he would make a lawyer of him, send him into politics, see him elected to the governorship, the Senate, the presidency. And he unfolded to him time after time all the rude American legendry of the country boys who became great men because they were country boys, poor boys, and hard-working farm boys. But Eliza thought of him as a scholar, a learned man, a professor, and with that convenient after-thought that annoyed Gant so deeply, but by which she firmly convinced herself, she saw in this book-brooder the fruit of her own deliberate design.

"I read every moment I could get the chance the summer before he was born," she said. And then, with a complacent and confidential smile which, Gant knew, always preceded some reference to her family, she said: "I tell you what: it may all come out in the Third Generation."

"The Third Generation be Goddamned!" answered Gant furiously.

"Now, I want to tell you," she went on thoughtfully, speaking with her forefinger, "folks have always said that his grandfather would have made a fine scholar if——"

"Merciful God!" said Gant, getting up suddenly and striding about the room with an ironical laugh. "I might have known that it would come to this! You may be sure," he exclaimed in high excitement, wetting his thumb briefly on his tongue, "that if there's any credit to be given I won't get it. Not from you! You'd rather die than admit it! No, but I'll tell you what you will do! You'll brag about that miserable old freak who never did a hard day's work in his life."

"Now, I wouldn't be so sure of that if I were you," Eliza began, her lips working rapidly.

"Jesus God!" he cried, flinging about the room with his customary indifference to reasoned debate. "Jesus God! What a travesty! A travesty on Nature! Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned!" he exclaimed, indefinitely but violently, and then as he strode about, he gave way to loud, bitter, forced laughter.

Thus, pent in his dark soul, Eugene sat brooding on a fire-lit book, a stranger in a noisy inn. The gates of his life were closing him in from their knowledge, a vast aerial world of phantasy was erecting its fuming and insubstantial fabric. He steeped his soul in streaming imagery, rifling the book-shelves for pictures and finding there such treasures as *With Stanley in Africa,* rich in the mystery of the jungle, alive with combat, black battle, the hurled spear, vast snake-rooted forests, thatched villages, gold and ivory; or Stoddard's *Lectures,* on whose slick heavy pages were stamped the most-visited scenes of Europe and Asia; a Book of Wonder, with enchanting drawings of all the marvels of the age—Santos Dumont in his balloon, liquid air poured from a kettle, all the navies of the earth lifted two feet from the water by an ounce of radium (Sir William Crookes), the building of the Eiffel Tower, the Flatiron Building, the stick-steered automobile, the submarine. After the earthquake in San Francisco there was a book describing it, its cheap green cover lurid with crumbling towers, shaken spires, toppling many-storied houses plunging into the splitting flame-jawed earth. And there was another called *Palaces of Sin,* or *The Devil in Society,* purporting to be the work of a pious millionaire, who had drained his vast fortune in exposing the painted sores that blemish the spotless-seeming hide of great position, and there were enticing pictures showing the author walking in a silk hat down a street full of magnificent palaces of sin.

Out of this strange jumbled gallery of pictures the pieced-out world was expanding under the brooding power of his imagination: the lost dark angels of the Doré "Milton" swooped into cavernous Hell beyond this upper earth of soaring or toppling spires, machine wonder, maced and mailed romance. And, as he thought of his future liberation into this epic world, where all the color of life blazed brightest far away from home, his heart flooded his face with lakes of blood.

He had heard already the ringing of remote church bells over a countryside on Sunday night; had listened to the earth steeped in the brooding symphony of dark, and the million-noted little night things; and he had heard thus the far retreating wail of a whistle in a distant valley, and faint thunder on the rails; and he felt the infinite depth and width of the golden world in the brief seductions of a thousand multiplex and mixed mysterious odors and sensations, weaving, with a blinding interplay and aural explosions, one into the other.

He remembered yet the East India Tea House at the Fair, the sandalwood, the turbans, and the robes, the cool interior and the smell of India tea; and he had felt now the nostalgic thrill of dew-wet mornings in Spring, the cherry scent, the cool clarion earth, the wet loaminess of the garden, the pungent breakfast smells and the floating snow of blossoms. He knew the inchoate sharp excitement of hot dandelions in young Spring grass at noon; the smell of cellars, cobwebs, and built-on secret earth; in July, of watermelons bedded in sweet hay, inside a farmer's covered wagon; of cantaloupe and crated peaches; and the scent of orange rind, bitter-sweet, before a fire of coals. He knew the good male smell of his father's sitting-room; of the smooth worn leather sofa, with the gaping horse-hair rent; of the blistered varnished wood upon the hearth; of the heated calf-skin bindings; of the flat moist plug of apple tobacco. stuck with a red flag; of wood-smoke and burnt leaves in October; of the brown tired autumn earth; of honey-suckle at night; of warm nasturtiums; of a clean ruddy farmer who comes weekly with printed butter, eggs and milk; of fat limp underdone bacon and of coffee; of a bakery-oven in the wind; of large deep-hued stringbeans smoking-hot and seasoned well with salt and butter; of a room of old pine boards in which books and carpets have been stored, long closed; of Concord grapes in their long white baskets.

Yes, and the exciting smell of chalk and varnished desks; the smell of heavy bread-sandwiches of cold fried meat and butter; the smell of new leather in a saddler's shop, or of a warm leather chair; of honey and of unground coffee; of barrelled sweet-pickles and cheese and all the fragrant compost of the grocer's; the smell of stored apples in the cellar, and of orchard-apple smells, of pressed-cider pulp; of pears ripening on a sunny shelf, and of ripe cherries stewing with sugar on hot stoves before preserving; the smell of whittled wood, of all young lumber, of sawdust and shavings; of peaches stuck with cloves and pickled in brandy; of pine-sap, and green pine-needles; of a horse's pared hoof; of chestnuts roasting, of bowls of nuts and raisins; of hot cracklin, and of young roast pork; of butter and cinnamon melting on hot candied yams.

Yes, and of the rank slow river, and of tomatoes rotten on the vine; the smell of rain-wet plums and boiling quinces; of rotten lily-pads; and of foul weeds rotting in green marsh scum; and the exquisite smell of the South, clean but funky, like a big woman; of soaking trees and the earth after heavy rain.

Yes, and the smell of hot daisy-fields in the morning; of melted puddling-iron in a foundry; the winter smell of horse-warm stables and smoking dung; of old oak and walnut; and the butcher's smell of meat, of strong slaughtered lamb, plump gouty liver, ground pasty sausages, and red beef; and of brown sugar melted with slivered bitter chocolate; and of crushed mint leaves, and of a wet lilac bush; of magnolia beneath the heavy moon, of dogwood and laurel; of an old caked pipe and Bourbon rye, aged in kegs of charred oak; the sharp smell of tobacco; of carbolic and nitric acids; the coarse true smell of a dog; of old imprisoned books; and the cool fern-smell near springs; of vanilla in cake-dough; and of cloven ponderous cheeses.

Yes, and of a hardware store, but mostly the good smell of nails; of the developing chemicals in a photographer's dark-room; and the young-life smell of paint and turpentine; of buckwheat batter and black sorghum; and of a negro and his horse, together; of boiling fudge; the brine smell of pickling vats; and the lush undergrowth smell of southern hills; of a slimy oyster-can, of chilled gutted fish; of a hot kitchen negress; of kerosene and linoleum; of sarsaparilla and guavas; and of ripe autumn persimmons; and the smell of the wind and the rain; and of the acrid thunder; of cold starlight, and the brittle-bladed frozen grass; of fog and the misted winter sun; of seed-time, bloom, and mellow dropping harvest.

And now, whetted intemperately by what he had felt, he began, at school, in that fecund romance, the geography, to breathe the mixed odors of the earth, sensing in every squat keg piled on a pier-head a treasure of golden rum, rich port, fat Burgundy; smelling the jungle growth of the tropics, the heavy odor of plantations, the salt-fish smell of harbors, voyaging in the vast, enchanting, but unperplexing world.

Now the innumerable archipelago had been threaded, and he stood, firm-planted, upon the unknown but waiting continent.

He learned to read almost at once, printing the shapes of words immediately with his strong visual memory; but it was weeks later before he learned to write, or even to copy, words. The ragged spume and wrack of fantasy and the lost world still floated from time to time through his clear schoolday morning brain, and although he followed accurately all the other instruction of his teacher, he was walled in his ancient unknowing world when they made letters. The children made their sprawling alphabets below a line of models, but all he accomplished was a line of jagged wavering spear-points on his sheet, which he repeated endlessly and rapturously, unable to see or understand the difference.

"I have learned to write," he thought.

Then, one day, Max Isaacs looked suddenly, from his exercise, on Eugene's sheet, and saw the jagged line.

"That ain't writin'," said he.

And clubbing his pencil in his warted grimy hand, he scrawled a copy of the exercise across the page.

The line of life, that beautiful developing structure of language that he saw flowing from his comrade's pencil, cut the knot in him that all instruction failed to do, and instantly he seized the pencil, and wrote the words in letters fairer and finer than his friend's. And he turned, with a cry in his throat, to the next page, and copied it without hesitation, and the next, the next. They looked at each other a moment with that clear wonder by which children accept miracles, and they never spoke of it again.

"That's writin' now," said Max. But they kept the mystery caged between them.

Eugene thought of this event later; always he could feel the opening gates in him, the plunge of the tide, the escape; but it happened like this one day at once. Still midget-near the live pelt of the earth, he saw many things that he kept in fearful secret, knowing that revelation would be punished with ridicule. One Saturday in Spring, he stopped with Max Isaacs above a deep pit in Central Avenue where city workmen were patching a broken watermain. The clay walls of their pit were much higher than their heads; behind their huddled backs there was a wide fissure, a window in the earth which opened on some dark subterranean passage. And as the boys looked, they gripped each other suddenly, for past the fissure slid the flat head of an enormous serpent; passed, and was followed by a scaled body as thick as a man's: the monster slid endlessly on into the deep earth and vanished behind the working and unwitting men. Shaken with fear they went away, they talked about it then and later in hushed voices, but they never revealed it.

He fell now easily into the School-Ritual; he choked his breakfast with his brothers every morning, gulped scalding coffee, and rushed off at the ominous warning of the final bell, clutching a hot paper-bag of food, already spattered hungrily with grease blots. He pounded along after his brothers, his heart hammering in his throat with excitement and, as he raced into the hollow at the foot of the Central Avenue hill, grew weak with nervousness, as he heard the bell ringing itself to sleep, jerking the slatting rope about in its dying echoes.

Ben, grinning evilly and scowling, would thrust his hand against the small of his back and rush him screaming, but unable to resist the plunging force behind, up the hill.

In a gasping voice he would sing the morning song, coming in pantingly on the last round of a song the quartered class took up at intervals:

"—Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream."

Or, in the frosty Autumn mornings:

"Waken, lords and ladies gay,
On the mountain dawns the day."

Or the Contest of the West Wind and the South Wind. Or the Miller's Song:

"I envy no man, no, not I,
And no one envies me."

He read quickly and easily; he spelled accurately. He did well with figures. But he hated the drawing lesson, although the boxes of crayons and paints delighted him. Sometimes the class would go into the woods, returning with specimens of flowers and leaves—the bitten flaming red of the maple, the brown pine comb, the brown oak leaf. These they would paint; or in Spring a spray of cherry-blossom, a tulip. He sat reverently before the authority of the plump woman who first taught him: he was terrified lest he do anything common or mean in her eyes.

The class squirmed: the little boys invented tortures or scrawled obscenities to the little girls. And the wilder and more indolent seized every chance of leaving the room, thus: "Teacher, may I be excused?" And they would go out into the lavatory, sniggering and dawdling about restlessly.

He could never say it, because it would reveal to her the shame of nature.

Once, deathly sick, but locked in silence and dumb nausea, he had vomited finally upon his cupped hands.

He feared and hated the recess periods, trembled before the brawling confusion of the mob and the playground, but his pride forbade that he skulk within, or secrete himself away from them. Eliza had allowed his hair to grow long; she wound it around her finger every morning into fat Fauntleroy curls: the agony and humiliation it caused him was horrible, but she was unable or unwilling to understand it, and mouth-pursingly thoughtful and stubborn to all solicitation to cut it. She had the garnered curls of Ben, Grover, and Luke stored in tiny boxes: she wept sometimes when she saw Eugene's, they were the symbol of his babyhood to her, and her sad heart, so keen in marking departures, refused to surrender them. Even when his thick locks had become the luxuriant colony of Harry Tarkinton's lice, she would not cut them: she held his squirming body between her knees twice a day and ploughed his scalp with a fine-toothed comb.

As he made to her his trembling passionate entreaties, she would smile with an affectation of patronizing humor, make a bantering humming noise in her throat, and say: "Why, say—you can't grow up yet. You're my baby." Suddenly baffled before the yielding inflexibility of her nature, which could be driven to action only after incessant and maddening prods, Eugene, screaming-mad with helpless fury, would understand the cause of Gant's frenzy.

At school, he was a desperate and hunted little animal. The herd, infallible in its banded instinct, knew at once that a stranger had been thrust into it, and it was merciless at the hunt. As the lunch-time recess came, Eugene, clutching his big grease-stained bag, would rush for the playground pursued by the yelping pack. The leaders, two or three big louts of advanced age and deficient mentality, pressed closely about him, calling out suppliantly, "You know me, 'Gene. You know me"; and still racing for the far end, he would open his bag and hurl to them one of his big sandwiches, which stayed them for a moment, as they fell upon its possessor and clawed it to fragments, but they were upon him in a moment more with the same yelping insistence, hunting him down into a corner of the fence, and pressing in with outstretched paws and wild entreaty. He would give them what he had, sometimes with a momentary gust of fury, tearing away from a greedy hand half of a sandwich and devouring it. When they saw he had no more to give, they went away.

The great fantasy of Christmas still kept him devout. Gant was his unwearied comrade; night after night in the late autumn and early winter, he would scrawl petitions to Santa Claus, listing interminably the gifts he wanted most, and transmitting each, with perfect trust, to the roaring chimney. As the flame took the paper from his hand and blew its charred ghost away with a howl, Gant would rush with him to the window, point to the stormy northern sky, and say: "There it goes! Do you see it?"

He saw it. He saw his prayer, winged with the stanch convoying winds, borne northward to the rimed quaint gables of Toyland, into frozen merry Elfland: heard the tiny silver anvil-tones, the deep-lunged laughter of the little men, the stabled cries of aerial reindeer. Gant saw and heard them, too.

He was liberally dowered with bright-painted gimcracks upon Christmas Day; and in his heart he hated those who advocated "useful" gifts. Gant bought him wagons, sleds, drums, horns—best of all, a small fireman's ladder wagon: it was the wonder, and finally the curse, of the neighborhood. During his unoccupied hours, he lived for months in the cellar with Harry Tarkinton and Max Isaacs: they strung the ladders on wires above the wagon, so that, at a touch, they would fall in accurate stacks. They would pretend to doze in their quarters, as firemen do, would leap to action suddenly, as one of them imitated the warning bell: "Clang-a-lang-a-lang." Then, quite beyond reason, Harry and Max yoked in a plunging team, Eugene in the driver's seat, they would leap out through the narrow door, gallop perilously to a neighbor's house, throw up ladders, open windows, effect entries, extinguish imaginary flames, and return oblivious to the shrieking indictment of the housewife.

For months they lived completely in this fantasy, modelling their actions on those of the town's firemen, and on Jannadeau, who was the assistant chief, child-proud over it: they had seen him, at the sound of the alarm, rush like a madman from his window in Gant's shop, leaving the spattered fragments of a watch upon his desk, and arriving at his duty just as the great wagon hurtled at full speed into the Square. The firemen loved to stage the most daring exhibitions before the gaping citizenry; helmeted magnificently, they hung from the wagons in gymnastic postures, one man holding another over rushing space, while number two caught in mid-air the diving heavy body of the Swiss, who deliberately risked his neck as he leaped for the rail. Thus, for one rapturous moment they stood poised triangularly over rocking speed: the spine of the town was chilled ecstatically.

And when the bells broke through the drowning winds at night, his demon rushed into his heart, bursting all cords that held him to the earth, promising him isolation and dominance over sea and land, inhabitation of the dark: he looked down on the whirling disk of dark forest and field, sloped over singing pines upon a huddled town, and carried its grated guarded fires against its own roofs, swerving and pouncing with his haltered storm upon their doomed and flaming walls, howling with thin laughter above their stricken heads and, fiend-voiced, calling down the bullet wind.

Or, holding in fief the storm and the dark and all the black powers of wizardry, to gaze, ghoul-visaged, through a storm-lashed window-pane, briefly planting unutterable horror in grouped and sheltered life; or, no more than a man, but holding, in your more than mortal heart, demoniac ecstasy, to crouch against a lonely storm-swept house, to gaze obliquely through the streaming glass upon a woman, or your enemy, and while still exulting in your victorious dark all-seeing isolation, to feel a touch upon your shoulder, and to look, haunter-haunted, pursuer-pursued, into the green corrupted hell-face of malignant death.

Yes, and a world of bedded women, fair glimmers in the panting darkness, while winds shook the house, and he arrived across the world between the fragrant columns of delight. The great mystery of their bodies groped darkly in him, but he had found there, at the school, instructors to desire—the hair-faced louts of Doubleday. They struck fear and wonder into the hearts of the smaller, gentler boys, for Doubleday was that infested region of the town-grown mountaineers, who lurked viciously through the night, and came at Hallowe'en to break the skulls of other gangs in rock warfare.

There was a boy named Otto Krause, a cheese-nosed, hair-faced, inch-browed German boy, lean and swift in the legs, hoarse-voiced and full of idiot laughter, who showed him the gardens of delight. There was a girl named Bessie Barnes, a black-haired, tall, bold-figured girl of thirteen years who acted as model. Otto Krause was fourteen, Eugene was eight: they were in the third grade. The German boy sat next to him, drew obscenities on his books, and passed his furtive scrawled indecencies across the aisle to Bessie.

And the nymph would answer with a lewd face, and a contemptuous blow against her shapely lifted buttock, a gesture which Otto considered as good as a promise, and which tickled him into hoarse sniggers.

Bessie walked in his brain.

In their furtive moments at school, he and Otto amused each other by drawing obscenities in their geographies, bestowing on the representations of tropical natives sagging breasts and huge organs. And they composed on tiny scraps of paper dirty little rhymes about teachers and principal. Their teacher was a gaunt red-faced spinster, with fierce glaring eyes: Eugene thought always of the soldier and the tinder and the dogs he had to pass, with eyes like saucers, windmills, the moon. Her name was Miss Groody, and Otto, with the idiot vulgarity of little boys, wrote of her:

"Old Miss Groody
Has Good Toody."

And Eugene, directing his fire against the principal, a plump, soft, foppish young man whose name was Armstrong, and who wore always a carnation in his coat, which, after whipping an offending boy, he was accustomed to hold delicately between his fingers, sniffing it with sensitive nostrils and lidded eyes, produced in the first rich joy of creation scores of rhymes, all to the discredit of Armstrong, his parentage, and his relations with Miss Groody.

He was obsessed; he spent the entire day now in the composition of poetry—all bawdy variations of a theme. And he could not bring himself to destroy them. His desk was stuffed with tiny crumpled balls of writing: one day, during the geography lesson, the woman caught him. His bones turned to rubber as she bore down on him glaring, and took from the concealing pages of his book the paper on which he had been writing. At recess she cleared his desk, read the sequence, and, with boding quietness, bade him to see the principal after school.

"What does it mean? What do you reckon it means?" he whispered dryly to Otto Krause.

"Oh, you'll ketch it now!" said Otto Krause, laughing hoarsely.

And the class tormented him slily, rubbing their bottoms when they caught his eye, and making grimaces of agony

He was sick through to his guts. He had a loathing of physical humiliation which was not based on fear, from which he never recovered. The brazen insensitive spirit of the boys he envied but could not imitate: they would howl loudly under punishment, in order to mitigate it, and they were vaingloriously unconcerned ten minutes later. He did not think he could endure being whipped by the fat young man with the flower: at three o'clock, white-faced, he went to the man's office.

Armstrong, slit-eyed and thin lipped, began to swish the cane he held in his hand through the air as Eugene entered. Behind him, smoothed and flatted on his desk, was stacked the damning pile of rhymed insult.

"Did you write these?" he demanded, narrowing his eyes to little points in order to frighten his victim.

"Yes," said Eugene.

The principal cut the air again with his cane. He had visited Daisy several times, had eaten at Gant's plenteous board. He remembered very well.

"What have I ever done to you, son, that you should feel this way?" he said, with a sudden change to whining magnanimity.

"N-n-nothing," said Eugene.

"Do you think you'll ever do it again?" said he, becoming ominous again.

"N-no, sir," Eugene answered, in the ghost of a voice.

"All right," said God, grandly, throwing away his cane. "You can go."

His legs found themselves only when he had reached the playground.

But oh, the brave autumn and the songs they sang; harvest, and the painting of a leaf; and "half-holiday to-day"; and "up in the air so high"; and the other one about the train—"the stations go whistling past"; the mellow days, the opening gates of desire, the smoky sun, the dropping patter of dead leaves.

"Every little snowflake is different in shape from every other."

"Good grashus! *All* of them, Miss Pratt?"

"All of the little snowflakes that ever were. Nature never repeats herself."

"Aw!"

Ben's beard was growing: he had shaved. He tumbled Eugene on the leather sofa, played with him for hours, scraped his stubble chin against the soft face of his brother. Eugene shrieked.

"When you can do that you'll be a man," said Ben.

And he sang softly, in his thin humming ghost's voice:

"The woodpecker pecked at the schoolhouse door,
He pecked and he pecked till his pecker got sore.
The woodpecker pecked at the schoolhouse bell,
He pecked and he pecked till his pecker got well."

They laughed—Eugene with rocking throatiness, Ben with a quiet snicker. He had aqueous gray eyes, and a sallow bumpy skin. His head was shapely, the forehead high and bony. His hair was crisp, maple-brown. Below his perpetual scowl, his face was small, converging to a point: his extraordinarily sensitive mouth smiled briefly, flickeringly, inwardly—like a flash of light along a blade. And he always gave a cuff instead of a caress: he was full of pride and tenderness.

IX

Yes, and in that month when Proserpine comes back, and Ceres' dead heart rekindles, when all the woods are a tender smoky blur, and birds no bigger than a budding leaf dart through the singing trees, and when odorous tar comes spongy in the streets, and boys roll balls of it upon their tongues, and they are lumpy with tops and agated marbles; and there is blasting thunder in the night, and the soaking millionfooted rain, and one looks out at morning on a stormy sky, a broken wrack of cloud; and when the mountain boy brings water to his kinsmen laying fence, and as the wind snakes through the grasses hears far in the valley below the long wail of the whistle, and the faint clangor of a bell; and the blue great cup of the hills seem closer, nearer, for he has heard an inarticulate promise: he has been pierced by Spring, that sharp knife.

And life unscales its rusty weathered pelt, and earth wells out in tender exhaustless strength, and the cup of a man's heart runs over with dateless expectancy, tongueless promise, indefinable desire. Something gathers in the throat, something blinds him in the eyes, and faint and valorous horns sound through the earth.

The little girls trot pigtailed primly on their dutiful way to school; but the young gods loiter: they hear the reed, the oatenstop, the running goathoofs in the spongy wood, here, there, everywhere: they dawdle, listen, fleetest when they wait, go vaguely on to their one fixed home, because the earth is full of ancient rumor and they cannot find the way. All of the gods have lost the way.

But they guarded what they had against the barbarians. Eugene, Max, and Harry ruled their little neighborhood: they made war upon the negroes and the Jews, who amused them, and upon the Pigtail Alley people, whom they hated and despised. Catlike they prowled about in the dark promise of night, sitting at times upon a wall in the exciting glare of the corner lamp, which flared gaseously, winking noisily from time to time.

Or, crouched in the concealing shrubbery of Gant's yard, they waited for romantic negro couples climbing homeward, jerking by a cord, as their victims came upon the spot, a stuffed black snake-appearing stocking. And the dark was shrill with laughter as the loud rich comic voices stammered, stopped, and screamed.

Or they stoned the cycling black boy of the markets, as he swerved down gracefully into an alley. Nor did they hate them: clowns are black. They had learned, as well, that it was proper to cuff these people kindly, curse them cheerfully, feed them magnanimously. Men are kind to a faithful wagging dog, but he must not walk habitually upon two legs. They knew that they must "take nothin' off a nigger," and that the beginnings of argument could best be scotched with a club and a broken head. Only, you couldn't break a nigger's head.

They spat joyously upon the Jews. Drown a Jew and hit a nigger.

The boys would wait on the Jews, follow them home shouting "Goose Grease! Goose Grease!" which, they were convinced, was the chief staple of Semitic diet; or with the blind acceptance of little boys of some traditional, or mangled, or imaginary catchword of abuse, they would yell after their muttering and tormented victim: "Veeshamadye! Veeshamadye!" confident that they had pronounced the most unspeakable, to Jewish ears, of affronts.

Eugene had no interest in pogroms, but it was a fetich with Max. The chief object of their torture was a little furtive-faced boy, whose name was Isaac Lipinski. They pounced cattishly at him when he appeared, harried him down alleys, over fences, across yards, into barns, stables, and his own house; he moved with amazing speed and stealth, escaping fantastically, teasing them to the pursuit, thumbing his fingers at them, and grinning with wide Kike constant derision.

Or, steeped catlike in the wickedness of darkness, adrift in the brooding promise of the neighborhood, they would cluster silently under a Jew's home, grouped in a sniggering huddle as they listened to the rich excited voices, the throaty accentuation of the women; or convulsed at the hysterical quarrels which shook the Jew-walls almost nightly.

Once, shrieking with laughter, they followed a running fight through the streets between a young Jew and his father-in-law, in which each was pursued and pummelled, or pursuing and pummelling; and on the day when Louis Greenberg, a pale Jew returned from college, had killed himself by drinking carbolic acid, they stood curiously outside the dingy wailing house, shaken by sudden glee as they saw his father, a bearded orthodox old Jew, clothed in rusty, greasy black, and wearing a scarred derby, approach running up the hill to his home, shaking his hands in the air, and wailing rhythmically:

"Oi yoi yoi yoi yoi,
Oi yoi yoi yoi yoi,
Oi yoi yoi yoi yoi."

But the whiteheaded children of Pigtail Alley they hated without humor, without any mitigation of a most bitter and alienate hate. Pigtail Alley was a muddy rut which sprawled down hill off the lower end of Woodson Street, ending vaguely in the rank stench of a greenscummed marsh bottom. On one side of this vile road there was a ragged line of whitewashed shacks, inhabited by poor whites, whose children were almost always white-haired, and who, snuff-mouthed bony women, and tobacco-jawed men, sprawled stupidly in the sun-stench of their rude wide-boarded porches. At night a smoky lamp burned dismally in the dark interiors, there was a smell of frying cookery and of unclean flesh, strident rasping shrews' cries, the drunken maniacal mountain drawl of men: a scream and a curse.

Once, in the cherry time, when Gant's great White Wax was loaded with its clusters, and the pliant and enduring boughs were dotted thickly by the neighbor children, Jews and Gentiles alike, who had been herded under the captaincy of Luke, and picked one quart of every four for their own, one of these white-haired children had come doubtfully, mournfully, up the yard.

"All right, son," Luke, who was fifteen, called out in his hearty voice. "Get a basket and come on up."

The child came up the gummed trunk like a cat: Eugene rocked from the slender spiral topmost bough, exulting in his lightness, the tree's resilient strength, and the great morning-clarion fragrant backyard world. The Alley picked his bucket with miraculous speed, skinned spryly to the ground and emptied it into the heaping pan, and was half-way up the trunk again when his gaunt mother streaked up the yard toward him.

"You, Reese," she shrilled, "what're you doin' hyar?" She jerked him roughly to the ground and cut across his brown legs with a switch. He howled.

"You git along home," she ordered, giving him another cut.

She drove him along, upbraiding him in her harsh voice, cutting him sharply with the switch from moment to moment when, desperate with pride and humiliation, he slackened his retreat to a slow walk, or balked mulishly, howling again, and speeding a few paces on his short legs, when cut by the switch.

The treed boys sniggered, but Eugene, who had seen the pain upon the gaunt hard face of the woman, the furious pity of her blazing eyes, felt something open and burst stabbingly in him like an abscess.

"He left his cherries," he said to his brother.

Or, they jeered Loney Shytle, who left a stale sharp odor as she passed, her dirty dun hair covered in a wide plumed hat, her heels out of her dirty white stockings. She had caused incestuous rivalry between her father and her brother, she bore the scar of her mother's razor in her neck, and she walked, in her rundown shoes, with the wide stiff-legged hobble of disease.

One day as they pressed round a trapped alley boy, who backed slowly, fearfully, resentfully into a reeking wall, Willie Isaacs, the younger brother of Max, pointing with sniggering laughter, said:

"His mother takes in washin'."

And then, almost bent double by a soaring touch of humor, he added:

"His mother takes in washin' from an ole nigger."

Harry Tarkinton laughed hoarsely. Eugene turned away indefinitely, craned his neck convulsively, lifted one foot sharply from the ground.

"She don't!" he screamed suddenly into their astounded faces. "She don't!"

Harry Tarkinton's parents were English. He was three or four years older than Eugene, an awkward, heavy, muscular boy, smelling always of his father's paints and oils, coarse-featured, meaty sloping jaw and a thick catarrhal look about his nose and mouth. He was the breaker of visions; the proposer of iniquities. In the cool thick evening grass of Gant's yard one sunset, he smashed forever, as they lay there talking, the enchantment of Christmas; but he brought in its stead the smell of paint, the gaseous ripstink, the unadorned, sweating, and imageless passion of the vulgar. But Eugene couldn't follow his barn-yard passion: the strong hen-stench, the Tarkintonian paint-smell, and the rank-mired branch-smell which mined under the filthy shambles of the backyard, stopped him.

Once, in the deserted afternoon, as he and Harry plundered through the vacant upper floor of Gant's house, they found a half-filled bottle of hair-restorer.

"Have you any hairs on your belly?" said Harry.

Eugene hemmed; hinted timidly at shagginess; confessed. They undid their buttons, smeared oily hands upon their bellies, and waited through rapturous days for the golden fleece.

"Hair makes a man of you," said Harry.

More often, as Spring deepened, he went now to Gant's shop on the Square. He loved the scene: the bright hill-cooled sun, the blown sheets of spray from the fountain, the garrulous firemen emerging from the winter, the lazy sprawling draymen on his father's wooden steps, snaking their whips deftly across the pavement, wrestling in heavy horseplay, Jannadeau in his dirty fly-specked window prying with delicate monocled intentness into the entrails of a watch, the reeking mossiness of Gant's fantastical brick shack, the great interior dustiness of the main room in front, sagging with gravestones—small polished slabs from Georgia, blunt ugly masses of Vermont granite, modest monuments with an urn, a cherub figure, or a couchant lamb, ponderous fly-specked angels from Carrara in Italy which he bought at great cost, and never sold—they were the joy of his heart.

Behind a wooden partition was his wash-room, layered with stonedust—coarse wooden trestles on which he carved inscriptions, stacked tool-shelves filled with chisels, drills, mallets, a pedalled emery wheel which Eugene worked furiously for hours, exulting in its mounting roar, piled sandstone bases, a small heat-blasted cast-iron stove, loose piled coal and wood.

Between the workroom and the ware-room, on the left as one entered, was Gant's office, a small room, deep in the dust of twenty years, with an old-fashioned desk, sheaves of banded dirty papers, a leather sofa, a smaller desk layered with round and square samples of marble and granite. The dirty window, which was never opened, looked out on the sloping market Square, pocketed obliquely off the public Square, and filled with the wagons of draymen and county peddlers, and on the lower side on a few Poor White houses and on the ware-house and office of Will Pentland.

Eugene would find his father, leaning perilously on Jannadeau's dirty glass showcase, or on the creaking little fence that marked him off, talking politics, war, death, and famine, denouncing the Democrats, with references to the bad weather, taxation, and soup-kitchens that attended their administration, and eulogizing all the acts, utterances, and policies of Theodore Roosevelt. Jannadeau, guttural, judiciously reasonable, statistically argumentative, would consult, in all disputed areas, his library—a greasy edition of the World Almanac, three years old, saying, triumphantly, after a moment of dirty thumbing: "Ah—just as I thought: the muni*cip*al taxation of Milwaukee under De*moc*ratic administration in 1905 was $2.25 the hundred, the lowest it had been in years. I cannot ima*gine* why the total revenue is not given." And he would argue with animation, picking his nose with his blunt black fingers, his broad yellow face breaking into flaccid creases, as he laughed gutturally at Gant's unreason.

"And you may mark my words," proceeded Gant, as if he had never been interrupted, and had heard no dissenting judgment, "if they get in again we'll have soup-kitchens, the banks will go to the wall, and your guts will grease your backbone before another winter's over."

Or, he would find his father in the workroom, bending over a trestle, using the heavy wooden mallet with delicate care, as he guided the chisel through the mazes of an inscription. He never wore workclothes; he worked dressed in well brushed garments of heavy black, his coat removed, and a long striped apron covering all his front. As Eugene saw him, he felt that this was no common craftsman, but a master, picking up his tools briefly for a *chef-d'œuvre.*

"He is better at this than any one in all the world," Eugene thought, and his dark vision burned in him for a moment, as he thought that his father's work would never, as men reckon years, be extinguished, but that when that great skeleton lay powdered in earth, in many a tangled undergrowth, in the rank wilderness of forgotten churchyards, these letters would endure.

And he thought with pity of all the grocers and brewers and clothiers who had come and gone, with their perishable work a forgotten excrement, or a rotted fabric; or of plumbers, like Max's father, whose work rusted under ground, or of painters, like Harry's, whose work scaled with the seasons, or was obliterated with newer brighter paint; and the high horror of death and oblivion, the decomposition of life, memory, desire, in the huge burial-ground of the earth stormed through his heart. He mourned for all the men who had gone because they had not scored their name upon a rock, blasted their mark upon a cliff, sought out the most imperishable objects of the world and graven there some token, some emblem that utterly they might not be forgotten.

Again, Eugene would find Gant moving with bent strides across the depth of the building, tearing madly along between the sentinel marbles that aisled the ware-room, muttering, with hands gripped behind him, with ominous ebb and flow. Eugene waited. Presently, when he had shuttled thus across his shop some eighty times, he would leap, with a furious howl, to his front door, storming out upon the porch, and delivering his Jeremiad to the offending draymen:

"You are the lowest of the low, the vilest of the vile. You lousy good-for-nothing bums: you have brought me to the verge of starvation, you have frightened away the little business that might have put bread in my mouth, and kept the wolf from my door. By God, I hate you, for you stink a mile off. You low degenerates, you accursed reprobates; you would steal the pennies from a dead man's eyes, as you have from mine, fearful, awful, and bloodthirsty mountain grills that you are!"

He would tear back into the shop muttering, to return almost at once, with a strained pretense at calmness, which ended in a howl:

"Now I want to tell you: I give you fair warning once and for all. If I find you on my steps again, I'll put you all in jail."

They would disperse sheepishly to their wagons, flicking their whips aimlessly along the pavements.

"By God, somethin's sure upset the ole man."

An hour later, like heavy buzzing flies, they would drift back, settling from nowhere on the broad steps.

As he emerged from the shop into the Square, they would greet him cheerfully, with a certain affection.

"'Day, Mr. Gant."

"Good day, boys," he would answer kindly, absently. And he would be away with his gaunt devouring strides.

As Eugene entered, if Gant were busy on a stone, he would say gruffly, "Hello, son," and continue with his work, until he had polished the surface of the marble with pumice and water. Then he would take off his apron, put on his coat, and say, to the dawdling, expectant boy: "Come on. I guess you're thirsty."

And they would go across the Square to the cool depth of the drug-store, stand before the onyx splendor of the fountain, under the revolving wooden fans, and drink chill gaseous beverages, limeade so cold it made the head ache, or foaming ice-cream soda, which returned in sharp delicious belches down his tender nostrils.

Eugene, richer by twenty-five cents, would leave Gant then, and spend the remainder of the day in the library on the Square. He read now rapidly and easily; he read romantic and adventurous novels, with a tearing hunger. At home he devoured Luke's piled shelves of five-cent novels: he was deep in the weekly adventures of *Young Wild West*, fantasied in bed at night of virtuous and heroic relations with the beautiful Arietta, followed Nick Carter, through all the mazes of metropolitan crime, Frank Merriwell's athletic triumphs, Fred Fearnot, and the interminable victories of *The Liberty Boys of '76* over the hated Redcoats.

He cared not so much for love at first as he did for material success: the straw figures of women in boys' books, something with hair, dancing eyes, and virtuous opinions, impeccably good and vacant, satisfied him completely: they were the guerdon of heroism, something to be freed from villainy on the nick by a blow or a shot, and to be enjoyed along with a fat income.

At the library he ravaged the shelves of boys' books, going unweariedly through all the infinite monotony of the Algers—*Pluck and Luck, Sink or Swim, Grit, Jack's Ward, Jed the Poorhouse Boy*—and dozens more. He gloated over the fat money-getting of these books (a motif in boys' books that has never been sufficiently recognized); all of the devices of fortune, the loose rail, the signalled train, the rich reward for heroism; or the full wallet found and restored to its owner; or the value of the supposedly worthless bonds; or the discovery of a rich patron in the city, sunk so deeply into his desires that he was never after able to quench them.

And all the details of money—the value of the estate usurped by the scoundrelly guardian and his caddish son, he feasted upon, reckoning up the amount of income, if it were not given, or if it were, dividing the annual sum into monthly and weekly portions, and dreaming on its purchasing power. His desires were not modest—no fortune under $250,000 satisfied him: the income of $100,000 at six per cent would pinch one, he felt, from lavishness; and if the reward of virtue was only twenty thousand dollars, he felt bitter chagrin, reckoning life insecure, and comfort a present warmth.

He built up a constant exchange of books among his companions, borrowing and lending in an intricate web, from Max Isaacs, from "Nosey" Schmidt, the butcher's son, who had all the rich adventures of the *Rover Boys;* he ransacked Gant's shelves at home, reading translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* at the same time as *Diamond Dick, Buffalo Bill,* and the Algers, and for the same reason; then, as the first years waned and the erotic gropings became more intelligible, he turned passionately to all romantic legendry, looking for women in whom blood ran hotly, whose breath was honey, and whose soft touch a spurting train of fire.

And in this pillage of the loaded shelves, he found himself wedged firmly into the grotesque pattern of Protestant fiction which yields the rewards of Dionysus to the loyal disciples of John Calvin, panting and praying in a breath, guarding the plumtree with the altar fires, outdoing the pagan harlot with the sanctified hussey.

Aye, thought he, he would have his cake and eat it too—but it would be a wedding-cake. He was devout in his desire to be a good man; he would bestow the accolade of his love upon nothing but a Virgin; he would marry himself to none but a Pure Woman. This, he saw from the books, would cause no renunciation of delight, for the good women were physically the most attractive.

He had learned unknowingly what the exquisite voluptuary finds, after weary toil, much later—that no condition of life is so favorable to his enjoyment as that one which is rigidly conventionalized. He had all the passionate fidelity of a child to the laws of the community: all the filtered deposit of Sunday Morning Presbyterianism had its effect.

He entombed himself in the flesh of a thousand fictional heroes, giving his favorites extension in life beyond their books, carrying their banners into the gray places of actuality, seeing himself now as the militant young clergyman, arrayed, in his war on slum conditions, against all the moneyed hostility of his fashionable church, aided in his hour of greatest travail by the lovely daughter of the millionaire tenement owner, and winning finally a victory for God, the poor, and himself.

. . . They stood silently a moment in the vast deserted nave of Saint Thomas'. Far in the depth of the vast church Old Michael's slender hands pressed softly on the organ-keys. The last rays of the setting sun poured in a golden shaft down through the western windows, falling for a moment, in a cloud of glory, as if in benediction, on Mainwaring's tired face.

"I am going," he said presently.

"Going?" she whispered. "Where?"

The organ music deepened.

"Out there," he gestured briefly to the West. "Out there—among His people."

"Going?" She could not conceal the tremor of her voice. "Going? Alone?"

He smiled sadly. The sun had set. The gathering darkness hid the suspicious moisture in his gray eyes.

"Yes, alone," he said. "Did not One greater than I go out alone some nineteen centuries ago?"

"Alone? Alone?" A sob rose in her throat and choked her.

"But before I go," he said, after a moment, in a voice which he strove in vain to render steady, "I want to tell you—" He paused a moment, struggling for mastery of his feelings.

"Yes?" she whispered.

"—That I shall never forget you, little girl, as long as I live. Never." He turned abruptly to depart.

"No, not alone! You shall not go alone!" she stopped him with a sudden cry.

He whirled as if he had been shot.

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" he cried hoarsely.

"Oh, can't you see! Can't you see!" She threw out her little hands imploringly, and her voice broke.

"Grace! Grace! Dear heaven, do you mean it!"

"You silly man! Oh, you dear blind foolish boy! Haven't you known for ages—since the day I first heard you preach at the Murphy Street settlement?"

He crushed her to him in a fierce embrace; her slender body yielded to his touch as he bent over her; and her round arms stole softly across his broad shoulders, around his neck, drawing his dark head to her as he planted hungry kisses on her closed eyes, the column of her throat, the parted petals of her fresh young lips.

"Not alone," she whispered. "Forever together."

"Forever," he answered solemnly. "So help me God."

The organ music swelled now into a triumphant pæan, filling with its exultant melody the vast darkness of the church. And as old Michael cast his heart into the music, the tears flowed unrestrained across his withered cheeks, but smiling happily through his tears, as dimly through his old eyes he saw the two young figures enacting again the age-old tale of youth and love, he murmured,

"I am the resurrection and the life, Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" . . .

Eugene turned his wet eyes to the light that streamed through the library windows, winked rapidly, gulped, and blew his nose heavily. Ah, yes! Ah, yes!

. . . The band of natives, seeing now that they had no more to fear, and wild with rage at the losses they had suffered, began to advance slowly toward the foot of the cliff, led by Taomi, who, dancing with fury, and hideous with warpaint, urged them on, exhorting them in a shrill voice.

Glendenning cursed softly under his breath as he looked once more at the empty cartridge belts, then grimly, as he gazed at the yelling horde below, slipped his two remaining cartridges into his Colt.

"For us?" she said, quietly. He nodded.

"It is the end?" she whispered, but without a trace of fear.

Again he nodded, and turned his head away for a moment. Presently he lifted his gray face to her.

"It is death, Veronica," he said, "and now I may speak."

"Yes, Bruce," she answered softly.

It was the first time he had ever heard her use his name, and his heart thrilled to it.

"I love you, Veronica," he said. "I have loved you ever since I found your almost lifeless body on the beach, during all the nights I lay outside your tent, listening to your quiet breathing within, love you most of all now in this hour of death when the obligation to keep silence no longer rests upon me."

"Dearest, dearest," she whispered, and he saw her face was wet with tears. "Why didn't you speak? I have loved you from the first."

She leaned toward him, her lips half-parted and tremulous, her breathing short and uncertain, and as his bare arms circled her fiercely their lips met in one long moment of rapture, one final moment of life and ecstasy, in which all the pent longing of their lives found release and consummation now at this triumphant moment of their death.

A distant reverberation shook the air. Glendenning looked up quickly, and rubbed his eyes with astonishment. There, in the island's little harbor were turning slowly the lean sides of a destroyer, and even as he looked, there was another burst of flame and smoke, and a whistling five-inch shell burst forty yards from where the natives had stopped. With a yell of mingled fear and baffled rage, they turned and fled off toward their canoes. Already, a boat, manned by the lusty arms of a blue-jacketed crew, had put off from the destroyer's side, and was coming in toward shore.

"Saved! We are saved!" cried Glendenning, and leaping to his feet he signalled the approaching boat. Suddenly he paused.

"Damn!" he muttered bitterly. "Oh, damn!"

"What is it, Bruce?" she asked.

He answered her in a cold harsh voice.

"A destroyer has just entered the harbor. We are saved, Miss Mullins. Saved!" And he laughed bitterly.

"Bruce! Dearest! What is it? Aren't you glad? Why do you act so strangely? We shall have all our life together."

"Together?" he said, with a harsh laugh. "Oh no, Miss Mullins. I know my place. Do you think old J. T. Mullins would let his daughter marry Bruce Glendenning, international vagabond, jack of all trades, and good at none of them? Oh no. That's over now, and it's good-by. I suppose," he said, with a wry smile, "I'll hear of your marriage to some Duke or Lord, or some of those foreigners some day. Well, good-by, Miss Mullins. Good luck. We'll both have to go our own way, I suppose." He turned away.

"You foolish boy! You dear bad silly boy!" She threw her arms around his neck, clasped him to her tightly, and scolded him tenderly. "Do you think I'll ever let you leave me now?"

"Veronica," he gasped. "Do you *mean* it?"

She tried to meet his adoring eyes, but couldn't: a rich wave of rosy red mantled her cheek, he drew her rapturously to him and, for the second time, but this time with the prophecy of eternal and abundant life before them, their lips met in sweet oblivion. . . .

Ah, me! Ah, me! Eugene's heart was filled with joy and sadness—with sorrow because the book was done. He pulled his clotted handkerchief from his pocket and blew the contents of his loaded heart into it in one mighty, triumphant and ecstatic blast of glory and sentiment. Ah, me! Good old Bruce-Eugene.

Lifted, by his fantasy, into a high interior world, he scored off briefly and entirely all the grimy smudges of life: he existed nobly in a heroic world with lovely and virtuous creatures. He saw himself in exalted circumstances with Bessie Barnes, her pure eyes dim with tears, her sweet lips tremulous with desire: he felt the strong handgrip of Honest Jack, her brother, his truehearted fidelity, the deep eternal locking of their brave souls, as they looked dumbly at each other with misty eyes, and thought of the pact of danger, the shoulder-to-shoulder drive through death and terror which had soldered them silently but implacably.

Eugene wanted the two things all men want: he wanted to be loved, and he wanted to be famous. His fame was chameleon, but its fruit and triumph lay at home, among the people of Altamont. The mountain town had for him enormous authority: with a child's egotism it was for him the centre of the earth, the small but dynamic core of all life. He saw himself winning Napoleonic triumphs in battle, falling, with his fierce picked men, like a thunderbolt upon an enemy's flank, trapping, hemming, and annihilating. He saw himself as the young captain of industry, dominant, victorious, rich; as the great criminal-lawyer bending to his eloquence a charmed court—but always he saw his return from the voyage wearing the great coronal of the world upon his modest brows.

The world was a phantasmal land of faery beyond the misted hem of the hills, a land of great reverberations, of genii-guarded orchards, wine-dark seas, chasmed and fantastical cities from which he would return into this substantial heart of life, his native town, with golden loot.

He quivered deliciously to temptation—he kept his titillated honor secure after subjecting it to the most trying inducements: the groomed beauty of the rich man's wife, publicly humiliated by her brutal husband, defended by Bruce-Eugene, and melting toward him with all the pure ardor of her lonely and womanly heart, pouring the sad measure of her life into his sympathetic ears over the wineglasses of her candled, rich, but intimate table. And as, in the shaded light, she moved yearningly toward him, sheathed plastically in her gown of rich velvet, he would detach gently the round arms that clung about his neck, the firm curved body that stuck gluily to his. Or the blonde princess in the fabulous Balkans, the empress of gabled Toyland, and the Doll Hussars—he would renounce, in a great scene upon the frontiers, her proffered renunciation, drinking eternal farewell on her red mouth, but wedding her to himself and to the citizenship of freedom when revolution had levelled her fortune to his own.

But, steeping himself in ancient myths, where the will and the deed were not thought darkly on, he spent himself, quilted in golden meadows, or in the green light of woods, in pagan love. Oh to be king, and see a fruity wide-hipped Jewess bathing on her roof, and to possess her; or a cragged and castled baron, to execute *le droit de seigneur* upon the choicest of the enfeoffed wives and wenches, in a vast chamber loud with the howling winds and lighted by the mad dancing flames of great logs!

But even more often, the shell of his morality broken to fragments by his desire, he would enact the bawdy fable of schoolboys, and picture himself in hot romance with a handsome teacher. In the fourth grade his teacher was a young, inexperienced, but well-built woman, with carrot-colored hair, and full of reckless laughter.

He saw himself, grown to the age of potency, a strong, heroic, brilliant boy, the one spot of incandescence in a backwoods school attended by snag-toothed children and hair-faced louts. And, as the mellow autumn ripened, her interest in him would intensify, she would "keep him in" for imaginary offenses, setting him, in a somewhat confused way, to do some task, and gazing at him with steady yearning eyes when she thought he was not looking.

He would pretend to be stumped by the exercise: she would come eagerly and sit beside him, leaning over so that a few fine strands of carrot-colored hair brushed his nostrils, and so that he might feel the firm warmth of her white-waisted arms, and the swell of her tight-skirted thighs. She would explain things to him at great length, guiding his fingers with her own warm, slightly moist hand, when he pretended not to find the place; then she would chide him gently, saying tenderly:

"Why are you such a bad boy?" or softly: "Do you think you're going to be better after this?"

And he, simulating boyish, inarticulate coyness, would say: "Gosh, Miss Edith, I didn't mean to do nothin'."

Later, as the golden sun was waning redly, and there was nothing in the room but the smell of chalk and the heavy buzz of the old October flies, they would prepare to depart. As he twisted carelessly into his overcoat, she would chide him, call him to her, arrange the lapels and his necktie, and smooth out his tousled hair, saying:

"You're a good-looking boy. I bet all the girls are wild about you."

He would blush in a maidenly way and she, bitten with curiosity, would press him:

"Come on, now. Who's your girl?"

"I haven't got one, honest, Miss Edith."

"You don't want one of these silly little girls, Eugene," she would say, coaxingly. "You're too good for them—you're a great deal older than your years. You need the understanding a mature woman can give you."

And they would walk away in the setting sun, skirting the pine-fresh woods, passing along the path red with maple leaves, past great ripening pumpkins in the fields, and under the golden autumnal odor of persimmons.

She would live alone with her mother, an old deaf woman, in a little cottage set back from the road against a shelter of lonely singing pines, with a few grand oaks and maples in the leaf-bedded yard.

Before they came to the house, crossing a field, it would be necessary to go over a stile; he would go over first, helping her down, looking ardently at the graceful curve of her long, deliberately exposed, silk-clad leg.

As the days shortened, they would come by dark, or under the heavy low-hanging autumnal moon. She would pretend to be frightened as they passed the woods, press in to him and take his arm at imaginary sounds, until one night, crossing the stile, boldly resolved upon an issue, she would pretend difficulty in descending, and he would lift her down in his arms. She would whisper:

"How strong you are, Eugene." Still holding her, his hand would shift under her knees. And as he lowered her upon the frozen clotted earth, she would kiss him passionately, again and again, pressing him to her, caressing him, and under the frosted persimmon tree fulfilling and yielding herself up to his maiden and unfledged desire.

"That boy's read books by the hundreds," Gant boasted about the town. "He's read everything in the library by now."

"By God, W. O., you'll have to make a lawyer out of him. That's what he's cut out for." Major Liddell spat accurately, out of his high cracked voice, across the pavement, and settled back in his chair below the library windows, smoothing his stained white pointed beard with a palsied hand. He was a veteran.

BUT this freedom, this isolation in print, this dreaming and unlimited time of fantasy, was not to last unbroken. Both Gant and Eliza were fluent apologists for economic independence: all the boys had been sent out to earn money at a very early age.

"It teaches a boy to be independent and self-reliant," said Gant, feeling he had heard this somewhere before.

"Pshaw!" said Eliza. "It won't do them a bit of harm. If they don't learn now, they won't do a stroke of work later on. Besides, they can earn their own pocket money." This, undoubtedly, was a consideration of the greatest importance.

Thus, the boys had gone out to work, after school hours, and in the vacations, since they were very young. Unhappily, neither Eliza nor Gant were at any pains to examine the kind of work their children did, contenting themselves vaguely with the comfortable assurance that all work which earned money was honest, commendable, and formative of character.

By this time Ben, sullen, silent, alone, had withdrawn more closely than ever into his heart: in the brawling house he came and went, and was remembered, like a phantom. Each morning at three o'clock, when his fragile unfurnished body should have been soaked in sleep, he got up under the morning stars, departed silently from the sleeping house, and went down to the roaring morning presses and the inksmell that he loved, to begin the delivery of his route. Almost without consideration by Gant and Eliza he slipped quietly away from school after the eighth grade, took on extra duties at the paper's office and lived, in sufficient bitter pride, upon his earnings. He slept at home, ate perhaps one meal a day there, loping home gauntly at night, with his father's stride, thin long shoulders, bent prematurely by the weight of the heavy paper bag, pathetically, hungrily Gantian.

He bore encysted in him the evidence of their tragic fault: he walked alone in the darkness, death and the dark angels hovered, and no one saw him. At three-thirty in the morning, with his loaded bag beside him, he sat with other route boys in a lunch room, with a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other, laughing softly, almost noiselessly, with his flickering exquisitely sensitive mouth, his scowling gray eyes.

At home he spent hours quietly absorbed in his life with Eugene, playing with him, cuffing him with his white hard hands from time to time, establishing with him a secret communication to which the life of the family had neither access nor understanding. From his small wages he gave the boy sums of spending-money, bought him expensive presents on his birthdays, at Christmas, or some special occasion, inwardly moved and pleased when he saw how like Mæcenas he seemed to Eugene, how deep and inexhaustible to the younger boy were his meagre resources. What he earned, all the history of his life away from home, he kept in jealous secrecy.

"It's nobody's business but my own. By God, I'm not asking any of you for anything," he said, sullenly and irritably, when Eliza pressed him curiously. He had a deep scowling affection for them all: he never forgot their birthdays, he always placed where they might find it, some gift, small, inexpensive, selected with the most discriminating taste. When, with their fervent over-emphasis, they went through long ecstasies of admiration, embroidering their thanks with florid decorations, he would jerk his head sideways to some imaginary listener, laughing softly and irritably, as he said:

"Oh for God's sake! Listen to this, won't you!"

Perhaps, as pigeon-toed, well creased, brushed, white-collared, Ben loped through the streets, or prowled softly and restlessly about the house, his dark angel wept, but no one else saw, and no one knew. He was a stranger, and as he sought through the house, he was always aprowl to find some entrance into life, some secret undiscovered door—a stone, a leaf,—that might admit him into light and fellowship. His passion for home was fundamental, in that jangled and clamorous household his sullen and contained quiet was like some soothing opiate on their nerves: with quiet authority, white-handed skill, he sought about repairing old scars, joining with delicate carpentry old broken things, prying quietly about a circuited wire, a defective socket.

"That boy's a born electrical engineer," said Gant. "I've a good notion to send him off to school." And he would paint a romantic picture of the prosperity of Mr. Charles Liddell, the Major's worthy son, who earned thousands by his electrical wizardry, and supported his father. And he would reproach them bitterly, as he dwelt on his own merit and the worthlessness of his sons:

"Other men's sons support their fathers in their old age—not mine! Not mine! Ah Lord—it will be a bitter day for me when I have to depend on one of mine. Tarkinton told me the other day that Rafe has given him five dollars a week for his food ever since he was sixteen. Do you think I could look for such treatment from one of mine? Do you? Not until Hell freezes over—and not then!" And he would refer to the hardships of his own youth, cast out, so he said, to earn his living, at an age which varied, according to his temper, at from six to eleven years, contrasting his poverty to the luxury in which his own children wallowed.

"No one ever did anything for me," he howled. "But everything's been done for you. And what gratitude do I get from you? Do you ever think of the old man who slaves up there in his cold shop in order to give you food and shelter? Do you? Ingratitude, more fierce than brutish beasts!" Remorseful food stuck vengefully in Eugene's throat.

Eugene was initiated to the ethics of success. It was not enough that a man work, though work was fundamental; it was even more important that he make money—a great deal if he was to be a great success—but at least enough to "support himself." This was for both Gant and Eliza the base of worth. Of so and so, they might say:

"He's not worth powder enough to kill him. He's never been able to support himself," to which Eliza, but not Gant, might add:

"He hasn't a stick of property to his name." This crowned him with infamy.

In the fresh sweet mornings of Spring now, Eugene was howled out of bed at six-thirty by his father, descended to the cool garden, and there, assisted by Gant, filled small strawberry baskets with great crinkled lettuces, radishes, plums, and green apples—somewhat later, with cherries. With these packed in a great hamper, he would peddle his wares through the neighborhood, selling them easily and delightfully, in a world of fragrant morning cookery, at five or ten cents a basket. He would return home gleefully with empty hamper in time for breakfast: he liked the work, the smell of gardens, of fresh wet vegetables; he loved the romantic structure of the earth which filled his pocket with chinking coins.

He was permitted to keep the money of his sales, although Eliza was annoyingly insistent that he should not squander it, but open a bank account with it with which, one day, he might establish himself in business, or buy a good piece of property. And she bought him a little bank, into which his reluctant fingers dropped a portion of his earnings, and from which he got a certain dreary satisfaction from time to time by shaking it close to his ear and dwelling hungrily on all the purchasable delight that was locked away from him in the small heavy bullion-chinking vault. There was a key, but Eliza kept it.

But, as the months passed, and the sturdy child's body of his infancy lengthened rapidly to some interior chemical expansion, and he became fragile, thin, pallid, but remarkably tall for his age, Eliza began to say: "That boy's big enough to do a little work."

Every Thursday afternoon now during the school months, and thence until Saturday, he was sent out upon the streets to sell *The Saturday Evening Post*, of which Luke held the local agency. Eugene hated the work with a deadly sweltering hatred; he watched the approach of Thursday with sick horror.

Luke had been the agent since his twelfth year: his reputation for salesmanship was sown through the town; he came with wide grin, exuberant vitality, wagging and witty tongue, hurling all his bursting energy into an insane extraversion. He lived absolutely in event: there was in him no secret place, nothing withheld and guarded—he had an instinctive horror of all loneliness.

He wanted above all else to be esteemed and liked by the world, and the need for the affection and esteem of his family was desperately essential. The fulsome praise, the heartiness of hand

and tongue, the liberal display of sentiment were as the breath of life to him: he was overwhelmingly insistent in the payment of drinks at the fountain, the bringer-home of packed ice-cream for Eliza, and of cigars to Gant and, as Gant gave publication to his generosity, the boy's need for it increased—he built up an image of himself as the Good Fellow, witty, unselfish, laughed at but liked by all—as Big-Hearted Unselfish Luke. And this was the opinion people had of him.

Many times in the years that followed, when Eugene's pockets were empty, Luke thrust a coin roughly and impatiently in them, but, hard as the younger boy's need might be, there was always an awkward scene—painful, embarrassed protestations, a distressful confusion because Eugene, having accurately and intuitively gauged his brother's hunger for gratitude and esteem, felt sharply that he was yielding up his independence to a bludgeoning desire.

He had never felt the slightest shame at Ben's bounty: his enormously sensitized perception had told him long since that he might get the curse of annoyance, the cuff of anger, from his brother, but that past indulgences would not be brandished over him, and that even the thought of having bestowed gifts would give Ben inward shame. In this, he was like Ben: the thought of a gift he made, with its self-congratulatory implications, made him writhe.

Thus, before he was ten, Eugene's brooding spirit was netted in the complexity of truth and seeming. He could find no words, no answers to the puzzles that baffled and maddened him: he found himself loathing that which bore the stamp of virtue, sick with weariness and horror at what was considered noble. He was hurled, at eight years, against the torturing paradox of the ungenerous-generous, the selfish-unselfish, the noble-base, and unable to fathom or define those deep springs of desire in the human spirit that seek public gratification by virtuous pretension, he was made wretched by the conviction of his own sinfulness.

There was in him a savage honesty, which exercised an uncontrollable domination over him when his heart or head were deeply involved. Thus, at the funeral of some remote kinsman, or of some acquaintance of the family, for whom he had never acquired any considerable affection, he would grow bitterly shamefast if, while listening to the solemn drone of the minister, or the sorrowful chanting of the singers, he felt his face had assumed an expression of unfelt and counterfeited grief: as a consequence he would shift about matter-of-factly, cross his legs, gaze indifferently at the ceiling, or look out of the window with a smile, until he was conscious his conduct had attracted the attention of people, and that they were looking on him with disfavor. Then, he felt a certain grim satisfaction as if, although having lost esteem, he had recorded his life.

But Luke flourished hardily in all the absurd mummery of the village: he gave heaping weight to every simulation of affection, grief, pity, good-will, and modesty—there was no excess that he did not underscore heavily, and the world's dull eye read him kindly.

He spun himself outward with ceaseless exuberance: he was genuinely and whole-heartedly involved. There was in him no toilsome web that might have checked him, no balancing or restraining weight—he had enormous energy, hungry gregariousness, the passion to pool his life.

In the family, where a simple brutal tag was enough for the appraisal of all fine consciences, Ben went simply as "the quiet one," Luke as the generous and unselfish one, Eugene as the "scholar." It served. The generous one, who had never in all his life had the power to fasten his mind upon the pages of a book, or the logic of number, for an hour together, resented, as he see-sawed comically from one leg to another, stammering quaintly, whistling for the word that stuck in his throat, the brooding abstraction of the youngest.

"Come on, this is no time for day-dreaming," he would stammer ironically. "The early bird catches the worm—it's time we went out on the street."

And although his reference to day-dreams was only part of the axiomatic mosaic of his speech, Eugene was startled and confused, feeling that his secret world, so fearfully guarded, had been revealed to ridicule. And the older boy, too, smarting from his own dismal performances at school, convinced himself that the deep inward turning of the spirit, the brooding retreat into the secret place, which he recognized in the mysterious hypnotic power of language over Eugene, was not only a species of indolence, for the only work he recognized was that which strained at weight or sweated in the facile waggery of the tongue, but that it was moreover the indulgence of a "selfish" family-forgetting spirit. He was determined to occupy alone the throne of goodness.

Thus, Eugene gathered vaguely but poignantly, that other boys of his age were not only self-supporting, but had for years kept their decrepit parents in luxury by their earnings as electrical engineers, presidents of banks, or members of Congress. There was, in fact, no excess of suggestion that Gant did not use upon his youngest son—he had felt, long since, the vibration to every tremor of feeling of the million-noted little instrument, and it pleased him to see the child wince, gulp, tortured with remorse. Thus, while he piled high with succulent meat the boy's platter, he would say sentimentally:

"I tell you what: there are not many boys who have what you have. What's going to become of you when your old father's dead and gone?" And he would paint a ghastly picture of himself lying cold in death, lowered forever into the damp rot of the earth, buried, forgotten—an event which, he hinted sorrowfully, was not remote.

"You'll remember the old man, then," he would say. "Ah, Lord! You never miss the water till the well goes dry," noting with keen pleasure the inward convulsion of the childish throat, the winking eyes, the tense constricted face.

"I'll vow, Mr. Gant," Eliza bridled, also pleased, "you oughtn't to do that to the child."

Or, he would speak sadly of "Little Jimmy," a legless little boy whom he had often pointed out to Eugene, who lived across the river from Riverside, the amusement park, and around whom he had woven a pathetic fable of poverty and orphanage which was desperately real now to his son. When Eugene was six, Gant had promised him carelessly a pony for Christmas, without any intention of fulfilling his promise. As Christmas neared he had begun to speak touchingly of "Little Jimmy," of the countless advantages of Eugene's lot and, after a mighty struggle, the boy had renounced the pony, in a scrawled message to Elfland, in favor of the cripple. Eugene never forgot: even when he had reached manhood the deception of "Little Jimmy" returned to him, without rancor, without ugliness, only with pain for all the blind waste, the stupid perjury, the thoughtless dishonor, the crippling dull deceit.

Luke parroted all of his father's sermon, but earnestly and witlessly, without Gant's humor, without his chicanery, only with his sentimentality. He lived in a world of symbols, large, crude, and gaudily painted, labelled "Father," "Mother," "Home," "Family," "Generosity," "Honor," "Unselfishness," made of sugar and molasses, and gummed glutinously with tear-shaped syrup.

"He's one good boy," the neighbors said.

"He's the cutest thing," said the ladies, who were charmed by his stutter, his wit, his good nature, his devout attendance on them.

"That boy's a hustler. He'll make his mark," said all the men in town.

And it was as the smiling hustler that he wanted to be known. He read piously all the circulars the Curtis Publishing Company sent to its agents: he posed himself in the various descriptive attitudes that were supposed to promote business—the proper manner of "approach," the most persuasive manner of drawing the journal from the bag, the animated description of its contents, in which he was supposed to be steeped as a result of his faithful reading—"the good salesman," the circulars said, "should know in and out the article he is selling"—a knowledge that Luke avoided, but which he replaced with eloquent invention of his own.

The literal digestion of these instructions resulted in one of the most fantastical exhibitions of print-vending ever seen: fortified by his own unlimited cheek, and by the pious axioms of the exhortations that "the good salesman will never take no for his answer," that he should "stick to his prospect" even if rebuffed, that he should "try to get the customer's psychology," the boy would fall into step with an unsuspecting pedestrian, open the broad sheets of *The Post* under the man's nose, and in a torrential harangue, sown thickly with stuttering speech, buffoonery, and ingratiation, delivered so rapidly that the man could neither accept nor reject the magazine, hound him before a grinning public down the length of a street, backing him defensively into a wall, and taking from the victim's eager fingers the five-cent coin that purchased his freedom.

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," he would begin in a sonorous voice, dropping wide-leggedly into the "prospect's" stride. "This week's edition of *The Saturday Evening Post,* five cents, only a nickel, p-p-p-purchased weekly by t-t-two million readers. In this week's issue you have eighty-six pages of f-f-fact and fiction, to say n-n-nothing of the advertisements. If you c-c-c-can't read you'll get m-m-more than your money's worth out of the p-p-pictures. On page 13 this week, we have a very fine article, by I-I-I-Isaac F. Marcosson, the f-f-f-famous traveller and writer on politics; on page 29, you have a story by Irvin S. Cobb, the g-g-g-greatest living humorist, and a new story of the prize-ring by J-J-Jack London. If you b-b-bought it in a book, it'd c-c-cost you a d-d-dollar-and-a-half."

He had, besides these chance victims, an extensive clientry among the townsfolk. Swinging briskly and cheerily down the street, full of greetings and glib repartee, he would accost each of the grinning men by a new title, in a rich stammering tenor voice:

"Colonel, how are you! Major—here you are, a week's reading hot off the press. Captain, how's the boy?"

"How are you, son?"

"Couldn't be better, General—slick as a puppy's belly!"

And they would roar with wheezing, red-faced, Southern laughter:

"By God, he's a good 'un. Here, son, give me one of the damn things. I don't want it, but I'll buy it just to hear you talk."

He was full of pungent and racy vulgarity: he had, more than any of the family, a Rabelaisian earthiness that surged in him with limitless energy, charging his tongue with unpremeditated comparisons, Gargantuan metaphors. Finally, he wet the bed every night in spite of Eliza's fretting complaints: it was the final touch of his stuttering, whistling, cheerful, vital, and comic personality—he was Luke, the unique, Luke, the incomparable: he was, in spite of his garrulous and fidgeting nervousness, an intensely likable person—and he really had in him a bottomless well of affection. He wanted bounteous praise for his acts, but he had a deep, genuine kindliness and tenderness.

Every week, on Thursday, in Gant's dusty little office, he would gather the grinning cluster of small boys who bought *The Post* from him, and harangue them before he sent them out on their duties:

"Well, have you thought of what you're going to tell them yet? You know you can't sit around on your little tails and expect them to look you up. Have you got a spiel worked out yet? How do you approach 'em, eh?" he said, turning fiercely to a stricken small boy. "Speak up, speak up, G-G-G-God-damn it—don't s-s-stand there looking at me. Haw!" he said, laughing with sudden wild idiocy, "look at that face, won't you?"

Gant surveyed the proceedings from afar with Jannadeau, grinning.

"All right, Christopher Columbus," continued Luke, good-humoredly, "What do you tell 'em, son?"

The boy cleared his throat timidly: "Mister, do you want to buy a copy of *The Saturday Evening Post?*"

"Oh, twah-twah," said Luke, with mincing delicacy, as the boys sniggered, "sweet twah-twah! Do you expect them to buy with a spiel like that? My God, where are your brains? Sail into them. Tackle them, and don't take no for an answer. Don't ask them if they *want* to buy. Dive into them: 'Here you are, sir—hot off the press.' Jesus Christ," he yelled, looking at the distant court-house clock with sudden fidget, "we should have been out an hour ago. Come on—don't stand there: here are your papers. How many do you want, you little Kike?"—for he had several Jews in his employ: they worshipped him and he was very fond of them—he liked their warmth, richness, humor.

"Twenty."

"Twenty!" he yelled. "You little loafer—you'll t-t-take fifty. G-g-go on, you c-c-can sell 'em all this afternoon. By G-G-God, papa," he said, pointing to the Jews, as Gant entered the office, "it l-l-looks like the Last S-S-Supper, don't it? All right!" he said, smacking across the buttocks a small boy who had bent for his quota. "Don't stick it in my face." They shrieked with laughter. "Dive in to them now. Don't let 'em get away from you." And, laughing and excited, he would send them out into the streets.

To this kind of employment and this method of exploitation Eugene was now initiated. He loathed the work with a deadly, an inexplicable loathing. But something in him festered deeply at the idea of disposing of his wares by the process of making such a wretched little nuisance of himself that riddance was purchased only at the price of the magazine. He writhed with shame and humiliation, but he stuck desperately to his task, a queer curly-headed passionate little creature, who raced along by the side of an astonished captive, pouring out of his dark eager face a hurricane of language. And men, fascinated somehow by this strange eloquence from a little boy, bought.

Sometimes the heavy paunch-bellied Federal judge, sometimes an attorney, a banker would take him home, bidding him to perform for their wives, the members of their families, giving him twenty-five cents when he was done, and dismissing him. "What do you think of that!" they said.

His first and nearest sales made, in the town, he would make the long circle on the hills and in the woods along the outskirts, visiting the tubercular sanitariums, selling the magazines easily and quickly—"like hot cakes" as Luke had it—to doctors and nurses, to white, unshaven, sensitive-faced Jews, to the wisp of a rake, spitting his rotten lungs into a cup, to good-looking young women who coughed slightly from time to time, but who smiled at him from their chairs, and let their warm soft hands touch his slightly as they paid him.

Once, at a hillside sanitarium, two young New York Jews had taken him to the room of one of them, closed the door behind him, and assaulted him, tumbling him on the bed, while one drew forth a pocket knife and informed him he was going to perform a caponizing operation on him. They were two young men bored with the hills, the town, the deadly régime of their treatment, and it occurred to him years later that they had concocted the business, days ahead, in their dull lives, living for the excitement and terror they would arouse in him. His response was more violent than they had bargained for: he went mad with fear, screamed, and fought insanely. They were weak as cats, he squirmed out of their grasp and off the bed cuffing and clawing tigerishly, striking and kicking them with blind and mounting rage. He was released by a nurse who unlocked the door and led him out into the sunlight, the two young consumptives, exhausted and frightened, remaining in their room. He was nauseated by fear and by the impact of his fists on their leprous bodies.

But the little mound of nickels and dimes and quarters chinked pleasantly in his pockets: leg-weary and exhausted he would stand before a gleaming fountain burying his hot face in an iced drink. Sometimes conscience-tortured, he would steal an hour away from the weary streets and go into the library for a period of enchantment and oblivion: he was often discovered by his watchful and bustling brother, who drove him out to his labor again, taunting and spurring him into activity.

"Wake up! You're not in Fairyland. Go after them."

Eugene's face was of no use to him as a mask: it was a dark pool in which every pebble of thought and feeling left its circle —his shame, his distaste for his employment was obvious, although he tried to conceal it: he was accused of false pride, told that he was "afraid of a little honest work," and reminded of the rich benefits he had received from his big-hearted parents.

He turned desperately to Ben. Sometimes Ben, loping along the streets of the town, met him, hot, tired, dirty, wearing his loaded canvas bag, scowled fiercely at him, upbraided him for his unkempt appearance, and took him into a lunch-room for something to eat—rich foaming milk, fat steaming kidney-beans, thick apple-pie.

Both Ben and Eugene were by nature aristocrats. Eugene had just begun to feel his social status—or rather his lack of one; Ben had felt it for years. The feeling at bottom might have resolved itself simply into a desire for the companionship of elegant and lovely women: neither was able, nor would have dared, to confess this, and Eugene was unable to confess that he was susceptible to the social snub, or the pain of caste inferiority: any suggestion that the companionship of elegant people was preferable to the fellowship of a world of Tarkintons, and its blousy daughters, would have been hailed with heavy ridicule by the family, as another indication of false and undemocratic pride. He would have been called "Mr. Vanderbilt" or "the Prince of Wales."

Ben, however, was not to be intimidated by their cant, or deceived by their twaddle. He saw them with bitter clarity, answered their pretensions with soft mocking laughter, and a brief nod upwards and to the side to the companion to whom he communicated all his contemptuous observation—his dark satiric angel: "Oh, my God! Listen to that, won't you?"

There was behind his scowling quiet eyes, something strange and fierce and unequivocal that frightened them: besides, he had secured for himself the kind of freedom they valued most—the economic freedom—and he spoke as he felt, answering their virtuous reproof with fierce quiet scorn.

One day, he stood, smelling of nicotine, before the fire, scowling darkly at Eugene who, grubby and tousled, had slung his heavy bag over his shoulder, and was preparing to depart.

"Come here, you little bum," he said. "When did you wash your hands last?" Scowling fiercely, he made a sudden motion as if to strike the boy, but he finished instead by re-tying, with his hard delicate hands, his tie.

"In God's name, mama," he burst out irritably to Eliza, "haven't you got a clean shirt to give him? You know, he ought to have one every month or so."

"What do you mean? What do you mean?" said Eliza with comic rapidity, looking up from a basket of socks she was darning. "I gave him that one last Tuesday."

"You little thug!" he growled, looking at Eugene with a fierce pain in his eyes. "Mama, for heaven's sake, why don't you send him to the barber's and get that lousy hair cut off? By God, I'll pay for it, if you don't want to spend the money."

She pursed her lips angrily and continued to darn. Eugene looked at him dumbly, gratefully. After Eugene had gone, the quiet one smoked moodily for a time, drawing the fragrant smoke in long gulps down into his thin lungs. Eliza, recollective and hurt at what had been said, worked on.

"What are you trying to do with your kid, mama?" he said in a hard quiet voice, after a silence. "Do you want to make a tramp out of him?"

"What do you mean? What do you mean?"

"Do you think it's right to send him out on the streets with every little thug in town?"

"Why, I don't know what you're talking about, boy," she said impatiently. "It's no disgrace for a boy to do a little honest work, and no one thinks so."

"Oh, my God," he said to the dark angel. "Listen to that!"

Eliza pursed her lips without speaking for a time.

"Pride goeth before a fall," she said after a moment. "Pride goeth before a fall."

"I can't see that that makes much difference to us," said he. "We've got no place to fall to."

"I consider myself as good as any one," she said, with dignity. "I hold my head up with any one I meet."

"Oh, my God," Ben said to his angel. "You don't meet anyone. I don't notice any of your fine brothers or their wives coming to see you."

This was true, and it hurt. She pursed her lips.

"No, mama," he continued after a moment's pause, "you and the Old Man have never given a damn what we've done so long as you thought you might save a nickel by it."

"Why, I don't know what you're talking about, boy," she answered. "You talk as if you thought we were Rich Folks. Beggars can't be choosers."

"Oh, my God," he laughed bitterly. "You and the Old Man like to make out you're paupers, but you've a sock full of money."

"I don't know what you mean," she said angrily.

"No," he said, with his frequent negative beginning, after a moody silence, "there are people in this town without a fifth what we've got who get twice as much out of it. The rest of us have never had anything, but I don't want to see the kid made into a little tramp."

There was a long silence. She darned bitterly, pursing her lips frequently, hovering between quiet and tears.

"I never thought," she began after a long pause, her mouth tremulous with a bitter hurt smile, "that I should live to hear such talk from a son of mine. You had better watch out," she hinted darkly, "a day of reckoning cometh. As sure as you live, as sure as you live. You will be repaid threefold for your unnatural," her voice sank to a tearful whisper, "your *unnatural* conduct!" She wept easily.

"Oh, my God," answered Ben, turning his lean, gray, bitter, bumpy face up toward his listening angel. "Listen to that, won't you?"

XI

Eliza saw Altamont not as so many hills, buildings, people: she saw it in the pattern of a gigantic blueprint. She knew the history of every piece of valuable property—who bought it, who sold it, who owned it in 1893, and what it was now worth. She watched the tides of traffic cannily; she knew by what corners the largest number of people passed in a day or an hour; she was sensitive to every growing-pain of the young town, gauging from year to year its growth in any direction, and deducing the probable direction of its future expansion. She judged distances critically, saw at once where the beaten route to an important centre was stupidly circuitous, and looking in a straight line through houses and lots, she said:

"There'll be a street through here some day."

Her vision of land and population was clear, crude, focal—there was nothing technical about it: it was extraordinary for its direct intensity. Her instinct was to buy cheaply where people would come; to keep out of pockets and *culs de sac,* to buy on a street that moved toward a centre, and that could be given extension.

Thus, she began to think of Dixieland. It was situated five minutes from the public square, on a pleasant sloping middle-class street of small homes and boarding-houses. Dixieland was a big cheaply constructed frame house of eighteen or twenty drafty high-ceilinged rooms: it had a rambling, unplanned, gabular appearance, and was painted a dirty yellow. It had a pleasant green front yard, not deep but wide, bordered by a row of young deep-bodied maples: there was a sloping depth of one hundred and ninety feet, a frontage of one hundred and twenty. And Eliza, looking toward the town, said: "They'll put a street behind there some day."

In winter, the wind blew howling blasts under the skirts of Dixieland: its back end was built high off the ground on wet columns of rotting brick. Its big rooms were heated by a small furnace which sent up, when charged with fire, a hot dry enervation to the rooms of the first floor, and a gaseous but chill radiation to those upstairs.

The place was for sale. Its owner was a middle-aged horse-faced gentleman whose name was the Reverend Wellington Hodge: he had begun life favorably in Altamont as a Methodist minister, but had run foul of trouble when he began to do double service to the Lord God of Hosts and John Barleycorn—his evangelical career came to an abrupt ending one winter's night when the streets were dumb with falling snow. Wellington, clad only in his winter heavies, made a wild sortie from Dixieland at two in the morning, announcing the kingdom of God and the banishment of the devil, in a mad marathon through the streets that landed him panting but victorious in front of the Post Office. Since then, with the assistance of his wife, he had eked out a hard living at the boarding-house. Now, he was spent, disgraced, and weary of the town.

Besides, the sheltering walls of Dixieland inspired him with horror—he felt that the malign influence of the house had governed his own disintegration. He was a sensitive man, and his promenades about his estate were checked by inhibited places: the cornice of the long girdling porch where a lodger had hanged himself one day at dawn, the spot in the hall where the consumptive had collapsed in a hemorrhage, the room where the old man cut his throat. He wanted to return to his home, a land of fast horses, wind-bent grass, and good whisky—Kentucky. He was ready to sell Dixieland.

Eliza pursed her lips more and more thoughtfully, went to town by way of Spring Street more and more often.

"That's going to be a good piece of property some day," she said to Gant.

He made no complaint. He felt suddenly the futility of opposing an implacable, an inexorable desire.

"Do you want it?" he said.

She pursed her lips several times: "It's a good buy," she said.

"You'll never regret it as long as you live, W. O.," said Dick Gudger, the agent.

"It's her house, Dick," said Gant wearily. "Make out the papers in her name."

She looked at him.

"I never want to own another piece of property as long as I live," said Gant. "It's a curse and a care, and the tax-collector gets all you have in the end."

Eliza pursed her lips and nodded.

She bought the place for seventy-five hundred dollars. She had enough money to make the first payment of fifteen hundred. The balance was to be paid in instalments of fifteen hundred dollars a year. This she knew she had to pay chiefly from the earnings of the house.

In the young autumn when the maples were still full and green, and the migratory swallows filled secretly the trees with clamor, and swooped of an evening in a black whirlwind down, drifting at its funnel end, like dead leaves, into their chosen chimney, Eliza moved into Dixieland. There was clangor, excitement, vast curiosity in the family about the purchase, but no clear conception of what had really happened. Gant and Eliza, although each felt dumbly that they had come to a decisive boundary in their lives, talked vaguely about their plans, spoke of Dixieland evasively as "a good investment," said nothing clearly. In fact, they felt their approaching separation instinctively: Eliza's life was moving by a half-blind but inevitable gravitation toward the centre of its desire—the exact meaning of her venture she would have been unable to define, but she had a deep conviction that the groping urge which had led her so blindly into death and misery at Saint Louis had now impelled her in the right direction. Her life was on the rails.

And however vaguely, confusedly, and casually they approached this complete disruption of their life together, the rooting up of their clamorous home, when the hour of departures came, the elements resolved themselves immutably and without hesitation.

Eliza took Eugene with her. He was the last tie that bound her to all the weary life of breast and cradle; he still slept with her of nights; she was like some swimmer who ventures out into a dark and desperate sea, not wholly trusting to her strength and destiny, but with a slender cord bound to her which stretches still to land.

With scarcely a word spoken, as if it had been known anciently and forever, Helen stayed with Gant.

The time for Daisy's marriage was growing near: she had been sought by a tall middle-aged shaven life-insurance agent, who wore spats, collars of immaculate starchiness five inches in height, who spoke with an unctuous and insane croon, chortling gently in his throat from time to time for no reason at all. His name was Mr. McKissem, and she had screwed up enough courage, after an arduous siege, to refuse him, upon the private grounds of insanity.

She had promised herself to a young South Carolinian, who was connected rather vaguely with the grocery trade. His hair was parted in the middle of his low forehead, his voice was soft, drawling, amiable, his manner hearty and insistent, his habits large and generous. He brought Gant cigars on his visits, the boys large boxes of assorted candies. Every one felt that he had favorable prospects.

As for the others—Ben and Luke only—they were left floating in limbo; for Steve, since his eighteenth year, had spent most of his life away from home, existing for months by semi-vagabondage, scrappy employment, and small forgeries upon his father, in New Orleans, Jacksonville, Memphis, and reappearing to his depressed family after long intervals by telegraphing that he was desperately sick or, through the intermediacy of a crony who borrowed the title of "doctor" for the occasion, that he was dying, and would come home in a box if he was not sent for in the emaciated flesh.

Thus, before he was eight, Eugene gained another roof and lost forever the tumultuous, unhappy, warm centre of his home. He had from day to day no clear idea where the day's food, shelter, lodging was to come from, although he was reasonably sure it would be given: he ate wherever he happened to hang his hat, either at Gant's or at his mother's; occasionally, although infrequently, he slept with Luke in the sloping, alcoved, gabled back room, rude with calcimine, with the high drafty steps that slanted to the kitchen porch, with the odor of old stacked books in packing-cases, with the sweet orchard scents. There were two beds; he exulted in his unaccustomed occupancy of an entire mattress, dreaming of the day of manlike privacy. But Eliza did not allow this often: he was riven into her flesh.

Forgetful of him during the day's press, she summoned him at night over the telephone, demanding his return, and upbraiding Helen for keeping him. There was a bitter submerged struggle over him between Eliza and her daughter: absorbed in the management of Dixieland for days, she would suddenly remember his absence from meals, and call for him angrily across the phone.

"Good heavens, mama," Helen would answer irritably. "He's your child, not mine. I'm not going to see him starve."

"What do you mean? What do you mean? He ran off while dinner was on the table. I've got a good meal fixed for him here. H-m! A *good* meal."

Helen put her hand over the mouthpiece, making a face at him as he stood catlike and sniggering by, burlesquing the Pentland manner, tone, mouthing.

"H-m! Why, law me, child, yes—it's *good* soup."

He was convulsed silently.

And then aloud: "Well, it's your own lookout, not mine. If he doesn't want to stay up there, I can't help it."

When he returned to Dixieland, Eliza would question him with bitter working lips; she would prick at his hot pride in an effort to keep him by her.

"What do you mean by running off to your papa's like that? If I were you, I'd have too much pride for that. I'd be a-sha-a-med!" Her face worked with a bitter hurt smile. "Helen can't be bothered with you. She doesn't want you around."

But the powerful charm of Gant's house, of its tacked and added whimsy, its male smell, its girdling rich vines, its great gummed trees, its roaring internal seclusiveness, the blistered varnish, the hot calf-skin, the comfort and abundance, seduced him easily away from the great chill tomb of Dixieland, particularly in winter, since Eliza was most sparing of coal.

Gant had already named it "The Barn"; in the morning now, after his heavy breakfast at home, he would swing gauntly toward town by way of Spring Street, composing en route the invective that he had formerly reserved to his sitting-room. He would stride through the wide chill hall of Dixieland, bursting in upon Eliza, and two or three negresses, busy preparing the morning meal for the hungry boarders who rocked energetically upon the porch. All of the objections, all of the abuse that had not been uttered when she bought the place, were vented now.

"Woman, you have deserted my bed and board, you have made a laughing stock of me before the world, and left your children to perish. Fiend that you are, there is nothing that you would not do to torture, humiliate and degrade me. You have deserted me in my old age; you have left me to die alone. Ah, Lord! It was a bitter day for us all when your gloating eyes first fell upon this damnable, this awful, this murderous and bloody Barn. There is no ignominy to which you will not stoop if you think it will put a nickel in your pocket. You have fallen so low not even your own brothers will come near you. 'Nor beast, nor man hath fallen so far.'"

And in the pantries, above the stove, into the dining-room, the rich voices of the negresses chuckled with laughter.

"Dat man sho' can tawk!"

Eliza got along badly with the negroes. She had all the dislike and distrust for them of the mountain people. Moreover, she had never been used to service, and she did not know how to accept or govern it graciously. She nagged and berated the sullen negro girls constantly, tortured by the thought that they were stealing her supplies and her furnishings, and dawdling away the time for which she paid them. And she paid them reluctantly, dribbling out their small wages a coin or two at a time, nagging them for their laziness and stupidity.

"What have you been doing all this time? Did you get those back rooms done upstairs?"

"No'm," said the negress sullenly, slatting flatfootedly down the kitchen.

"I'll vow," Eliza fretted. "I never saw such a good-for-nothing shiftless darkey in my life. You needn't think I'm going to pay you for wasting your time."

This would go on throughout the day. As a result, Eliza would often begin the day without a servant: the girls departed at night muttering sullenly, and did not appear the next morning. Moreover, her reputation for bickering pettiness spread through the length and breadth of Niggertown. It became increasingly difficult for her to find any one at all who would work for her. Completely flustered when she awoke to find herself without help, she would immediately call Helen over the telephone, pouring her fretful story into the girl's ears and entreating assistance:

"I'll declare, child, I don't know what I'm going to do. I could wring that worthless nigger's neck. Here I am left all alone with a house full of people."

"Mama, in heaven's name, what's the matter? Can't you keep a nigger in the house? Other people do. What do you do to them, anyway?"

But, fuming and irritable, she would leave Gant's and go to her mother's, serving the tables with large heartiness, nervous and animated good-humor. All the boarders were very fond of her: they said she was a fine girl. Every one did. There was a spacious and unsparing generosity about her, a dominant consuming vitality, which ate at her poor health, her slender supply of strength, so that her shattered nerves drew her frequently toward hysteria, and sometimes toward physical collapse. She was almost six feet tall: she had large hands and feet, thin straight legs, a big-boned generous face, with the long full chin slightly adroop, revealing her big gold-traced upper teeth. But, in spite of this gauntness, she did not look hard-featured or rawboned. Her face was full of heartiness and devotion, sensitive, whole-souled, hurt, bitter, hysterical, but at times transparently radiant and handsome.

It was a spiritual and physical necessity for her to exhaust herself in service for others, and it was necessary for her to receive heavy slatherings of praise for that service, and especially necessary that she feel her efforts had gone unappreciated. Even at the beginning, she would become almost frantic reciting her grievances, telling the story of her service to Eliza in a voice that became harsh and hysterical:

"Let the least little thing go wrong and she's at the phone.

It's not my place to go up there and work like a nigger for a crowd of old cheap boarders. You know that, don't you? *Don't* you?"

"Yes'm," said Eugene, meekly serving as audience.

"But she'd die rather than admit it. Do you ever hear her say a word of thanks? Do I get," she said laughing suddenly, her hysteria crossed for the moment with her great humor, "do I get so much as 'go-to-hell' for it?"

"No!" squealed Eugene, going off in fits of idiot laughter.

"Why, law me, child. H-m! Yes. It's *good* soup," said she, touched with her great earthy burlesque.

He tore his collar open, and undid his trousers, sliding to the floor in an apoplexy of laughter.

"Sdop! Sdop! You're g-g-gilling me!"

"H-m! Why, law me! Yes," she continued, grinning at him as if she hoped to succeed.

Nevertheless, whether Eliza was servantless or not, she went daily at dinner, the mid-day meal, to help at table, and frequently at night when Gant and the boys ate with Eliza instead of at home. She went because of her deep desire to serve, because it satisfied her need for giving more than was returned, and because, in spite of her jibes, along with Gant, at the Barn, and the "cheap boarders," the animation of feeding, the clatter of plates, the braided clamor of their talk, stimulated and excited her.

Like Gant, like Luke, she needed extension in life, movement, excitement: she wanted to dominate, to entertain, to be the life of the party. On small solicitation, she sang for the boarders, thumping the cheap piano with her heavy accurate touch, and singing in her strong, vibrant, somewhat hard soprano a repertory of songs classical, sentimental, and comic. Eugene remembered the soft cool nights of summer, the assembled boarders and "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," which Gant demanded over and over; "Love Me and the World Is Mine"; "Till the Sands of the Desert Grow Cold"; "Dear Old Girl, the Rob-*bin* Sings Above You"; "The End of a Perfect Day"; and "Alexander's Rag-Time Band," which Luke had practised in a tortured house for weeks, and sung with thunderous success in the High School Minstrels.

Later, in the cool dark, Gant, rocking violently, would hold forth on the porch, his great voice carrying across the quiet neighborhood, as he held the charmed boarders by his torrential eloquence, his solution of problems of state, his prejudiced but bold opinion upon current news.

"—And what did *we* do, gentlemen? We sank their navy in an action that lasted only twenty minutes, stormed at by shot and shell, Teddy and his Rough Riders took the hill at Santiago —it was all over, as you well know, in a few months. We had declared war with no thought of ulterior gain; we came because the indignation of a *great* people had been aroused at the oppression of a smaller one, and then, with a magnanimity well worthy the greatest people on the face of the earth, we paid our defeated enemy twenty millions of dollars. Ah, Lord! That was magnanimity indeed! You don't think any other nation would have done that, do you?"

"No, sir," said the boarders emphatically.

They didn't always agree with his political opinions—Roosevelt was the faultless descendant of Julius Cæsar, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Abraham Lincoln—but they felt he had a fine head and would have gone far in politics.

"That man should have been a lawyer," said the boarders.

And yet, there was surging into these chosen hills the strong thrust of the world, like a kissing tide, which swings lazily in with a slapping glut of waters, and recoils into its parent crescent strength, to be thrown farther inward once again.

It was an element of Eliza's primitive and focal reasoning that men and women withered by the desert would seek an oasis, that those who were thirsty would seek water, and that those panting on the plains would look into the hills for comfort and relief. She had that bull's-eye accuracy which has since been celebrated, when plum-picking's over, under the name of "vision."

The streets, ten years before raw clay, were being paved: Gant went into frenzies over the paving assessments, cursed the land, the day of his birth, the machinations of Satan's children. But Eugene followed the wheeled casks of boiling tar; watched the great roller, a monster that crushed him in night-mares, powder the layered rock; felt, as he saw the odorous pressed tongue of pavement lengthen out, a swelling ecstasy.

From time to time, a stilted Cadillac gasped cylindrically up the hill past Dixieland: Eugene said a spell, as it faltered, for its success—Jim Sawyer, a young blood, came for Miss Cutler, the Pittsburgh beauty: he opened a door behind in the fat red belly. They got in.

Sometimes, when Eliza awoke to find her servants gone, he was sent down into Niggertown to capture a new one: in that city of rickets he searched into their fetid shacks, past the slow stench of little rills of mire and sewage, in fetid cellars, through all the rank labyrinth of the hill-sprawled settlement. He came, in the hot sealed dungeons of their rooms, to know the wild grace of their bodies, thrown upon a bed, their rich laughter, their smell of the jungle tropics stewed in with frying cookery and a boiling wash.

"Do you want a job?"

"Whose little boy are you?"

"Mrs. Eliza Gant's."

Silence. Presently: "Dere's a gal up de street at Mis' Cawpening's who's lookin' fo' wuk. *You* go see *huh.*"

Eliza watched them with a falcon's eye for thefts. Once, with a detective, she searched a departed girl's room in Niggertown, finding there sheets, towels, spoons that had been stolen from her. The girl went to the penitentiary for two years. Eliza loved the commotion of law, the smell and tension of the courts. Whenever she could go to law she did so: she delighted in bringing suit against people, or in having suit brought against her. She always won.

When her boarders defaulted payments she seized their belongings triumphantly, delighting particularly in eleventh-hour captures at the railway station, with the aid of an obedient constabulary, and ringed by the attentive offal of the town.

Eugene was ashamed of Dixieland. And he was again afraid to express his shame. As with *The Post,* he felt thwarted, netted, trapped. He hated the indecency of his life, the loss of dignity and seclusion, the surrender to the tumultuous rabble of the four walls which shield us from them. He felt, rather than understood, the waste, the confusion, the blind cruelty of their lives—his spirit was stretched out on the rack of despair and bafflement as there came to him more and more the conviction that their lives could not be more hopelessly distorted, wrenched, mutilated, and perverted away from all simple comfort, repose, happiness, if they set themselves deliberately to tangle the skein, twist the pattern. He choked with fury: he thought of Eliza's slow speech, her endless reminiscence, her maddening lip-pursing, and turned white with constricted rage.

He saw plainly by this time that their poverty, the threat of the poorhouse, the lurid references to the pauper's grave, belonged to the insensate mythology of hoarding; anger smouldered like a brand in him at their sorry greed. There was no place sacred unto themselves, no place fixed for their own inhabitation, no place proof against the invasion of the boarders. As the house filled, they went from room to little room, going successively down the shabby scale of their lives. He felt it would hurt them, coarsen them: he had even then an intense faith in food, in housing, in comfort—he felt that a civilized man must begin with them; he knew that wherever the spirit had withered, it had not withered because of food and plumbing.

As the house filled, in the summer season, and it was necessary to wait until the boarders had eaten before a place could be found for him, he walked sullenly about beneath the propped back porch of Dixieland, savagely exploring the dark cellar, or the two dank windowless rooms which Eliza rented, when she could, to negresses.

He felt now the petty cruelty of village caste. On Sunday for several years, he had bathed, brushed, arrayed his anointed body in clean underwear and shirting and departed, amid all the pleasurable bustle of Sunday morning, for the Presbyterian Sunday School. He had by this time been delivered from the instruction of the several spinsters who had taught his infant faith the catechism, the goodness of God, and the elements of celestial architecture. The five-cent piece which formerly he had yielded up reluctantly, thinking of cakes and ale, he now surrendered more gladly, since he usually had enough left over for cold gaseous draughts at the soda-fountain.

In the fresh Sunday morning air he marched off with brisk excitement to do duty at the altars, pausing near the church where the marshalled ranks of the boys' military school split cleanly into regimented Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians.

The children assembled in a big room adjacent to the church, honeycombed to right and left with small classrooms, which they entered after the preliminary service was finished. They were exhorted from the platform by the superintendent, a Scotch dentist with a black-gray beard, fringed by a small area of embalmed skin, whose cells, tissues, and chemical juices seemed to have been fixed in a state of ageless suspension, and who looked no older from one decade to another.

He read the text, or the parable of the day's study, commented on it with Cæsarean dryness and concision, and surrendered the service to his assistant, a shaven, spectacled, Wilsonian-looking man, also Scotch, who smiled with cold affection at them over his high shiny collar, and led them through the verses of a hymn, heaving up his arms and leering at them encouragingly, as they approached the chorus. A sturdy spinstress thumped heavily upon a piano which shook like a leaf.

Eugene liked the high crystal voices of the little children, backed by the substantial marrow of the older boys and girls, and based on the strong volume of the Junior and Senior Baraccas and Philatheas. They sang:

> "Throw out the lifeline, throw out the lifeline,
> Someone is sinking to-day-ee"—

on the mornings when the collection went for missionary work. And they sang:

> "Shall we gather at the river,
> The bew-tee-ful, the bew-tee-ful r-hiver."

He liked that one very much. And the noble surge of "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

Later, he went into one of the little rooms with his class. The sliding doors rumbled together all around; presently there was a quiet drone throughout the building.

He was now in a class composed entirely of boys. His teacher was a tall white-faced young man, bent and thin, who was known to all the other boys as secretary of the Y. M. C. A. He was tubercular; but the boys admired him because of his former skill as a baseball and basketball player. He spoke in a sad, sugary, whining voice; he was oppressively Christ-like; he spoke to them intimately about the lesson of the day, asking them what it might teach them in their daily lives, in acts of obedience and love to their parents and friends, in duty, courtesy, and Christian charity. And he told them that when they were in doubt about their conduct they should ask themselves what Jesus would say: he spoke of Jesus often in his melancholy, somewhat discontented voice—Eugene became vaguely miserable as he talked, thinking of something soft, furry, with a wet tongue.

He was nervous and constrained: the other boys knew one another intimately—they lived on, or in the neighborhood of Montgomery Avenue, which was the most fashionable street in town. Sometimes, one of them said to him, grinning: "Do you want to buy *The Saturday Evening Post,* Mister?"

Eugene, during the week, never touched the lives of any of them, even in a remote way. His idea of their eminence was grossly exaggerated; the town had grown rapidly from a straggling village—it had few families as old as the Pentlands, and, like all resort towns, its caste system was liquidly variable, depending chiefly upon wealth, ambition, and boldness.

Harry Tarkinton and Max Isaacs were Baptists, as were most of the people, the Scotch excepted, in Gant's neighborhood. In the social scale the Baptists were the most populous and were considered the most common: their minister was a large plump man with a red face and a white vest, who reached great oratorical effects, roaring at them like a lion, cooing at them like a dove, introducing his wife into the sermon frequently for purposes of intimacy and laughter, in a programme which the Episcopalians, who held the highest social eminence, and the Presbyterians, less fashionable, but solidly decent, felt was hardly chaste. The Methodists occupied the middle ground between vulgarity and decorum.

This starched and well brushed world of Sunday morning Presbyterianism, with its sober decency, its sense of restraint its suggestion of quiet wealth, solid position, ordered ritual, seclusive establishment, moved him deeply with its tranquillity. He felt concretely his isolation from it, he entered it from the jangled disorder of his own life once a week, looking at it, and departing from it, for years, with the sad heart of a stranger. And from the mellow gloom of the church, the rich distant organ, the quiet nasal voice of the Scotch minister, the interminable prayers, and the rich little pictures of Christian mythology which he had collected as a child under the instruction of the spinsters, he gathered something of the pain, the mystery, the sensuous beauty of religion, something deeper and greater than this austere decency.

XII

It was the winter, and the sullen dying autumn that he hated most at Dixieland—the dim fly-specked lights, the wretched progress about the house in search of warmth, Eliza untidily wrapped in an old sweater, a dirty muffler, a cast-off man's coat. She glycerined her cold-cracked hands. The chill walls festered with damp: they drank in death from the atmosphere: a woman died of typhoid, her husband came quickly out into the hall and dropped his hands. They were Ohio people.

Upstairs, upon a sleeping porch, a thin-faced Jew coughed through the interminable dark.

"In heaven's name, mama," Helen fumed, "why do you take them in? Can't you see he's got the bugs?"

"Why, no-o," said Eliza, pursing her lips. "He said he only had a little bronchial trouble. I asked him about it, and he laughed just as big as you please: 'Why, Mrs. Gant,' he said—" and there would follow an endless anecdote, embellished with many a winding rivulet. The girl raged: it was one of Eliza's basic traits to defend blindly whatever brought her money.

The Jew was a kind man. He coughed gently behind his white hand and ate bread fried in battered egg and butter. Eugene developed a keen appetite for it: innocently he called it "Jew Bread" and asked for more. Lichenfels laughed gently, coughed—his wife was full of swart rich laughter. The boy did small services for him: he gave him a coin from week to week. He was a clothier from a New Jersey town. In the Spring he went to a sanitarium; he died there later.

In the winter a few chill boarders, those faces, those personalities which become mediocre through repetition, sat for hours before the coals of the parlor hearth, rocking interminably, dull of voice and gesture, as hideously bored with themselves and Dixieland, no doubt, as he with them.

He liked the summers better. There came slow-bodied women from the hot rich South, dark-haired white-bodied girls from New Orleans, corn-haired blondes from Georgia, nigger-drawling desire from South Carolina. And there was malarial lassitude, tinged faintly with yellow, from Mississippi but with white biting teeth. A red-faced South Carolinian, with nicotined fingers, took him daily to the baseball games; a lank yellow planter, malarial from Mississippi, climbed hill, and wandered through the fragrant mountain valleys with him; of nights he heard the rich laughter of the women, tender and cruel, upon the dark porches, heard the florid throat-tones of the men; saw the yielding stealthy harlotry of the South—the dark seclusion of their midnight bodies, their morning innocence. Desire, with bloody beak, tore at his heart like jealous virtue: he was moral for that which was denied him.

Of mornings he stayed at Gant's with Helen, playing ball with Buster Isaacs, a cousin of Max, a plump jolly little boy who lived next door; summoned later by the rich incense of Helen's boiling fudge. She sent him to the little Jewish grocery down the street for the sour relishes she liked so well: tabled in mid-morning they ate sour pickles, heavy slabs of ripe tomatoes, coated with thick mayonnaise, amber percolated coffee, fig-newtons and ladyfingers, hot pungent fudge pebbled with walnuts and coated fragrantly with butter, sandwiches of tender bacon and cucumber, iced belchy soft-drinks.

His trust in her Gantian wealth was boundless: this rich store of delight came from inexhaustible resources. Warm lively hens cackled cheerfully throughout the morning neighborhood; powerful negroes brought dripping ice in iron talons from their smoking wagons; he stood beneath their droning saws and caught the flying ice-pulp in his hands; he drank in the combined odor of their great bodies together with the rich compost of the refrigeration, and the sharp oiliness of the dining-room linoleum; and in the horsehair walnut parlor at mid-day, good with the mellow piano-smell and the smell of stale varnished wood, she played for him, and made him sing: "William Tell," "My Heart at Thy Sweet Voice," "The Song Without Words," "*Celeste Aïda*," "The Lost Chord," her long throat lean and tendoned as her vibrant voice rang out.

She took insatiable delight in him, stuffing him with sour and sugared relishes, tumbling him, in a random moment of her restless activity, upon Gant's lounge, and pinioning him while she slapped his squirming face sharply with her big hand.

Sometimes, frantic with some swift tangle of her nerves, she would attack him viciously, hating him for his dark brooding face, his full scalloped underlip, his deep absorption in a dream. Like Luke, and like Gant, she sought in the world ceaseless entertainment for her restless biting vitality: it infuriated her to see other people seek absorption within themselves—she hated him at times when, her own wires strumming, she saw his dark face brooding over a book or on some vision. She would tear the book from his hands, slap him, and stab him with her cruel savage tongue. She would pout out her lip, goggle her face about stupidly on a drooping neck, assume an expression of dopey idiocy, and pour out on him the horrible torrent of her venom.

"You little freak—wandering around with your queer dopey face. You're a regular little Pentland—you funny little freak, you. Everybody's laughing at you. Don't you know that? Don't you? We're going to dress you up as a girl, and let you go around like that. You haven't got a drop of Gant blood in you—papa's practically said as much—you're Greeley all over again; you're queer. Pentland queerness sticking out all over you."

Sometimes her sweltering and inchoate fury was so great that she threw him on the floor and stamped on him.

He did not mind the physical assault so much as he did the poisonous hatred of her tongue, insanely clever in fashioning the most wounding barbs. He went frantic with horror, jerked unexpectedly from Elfland into Hell, he bellowed madly, saw his bountiful angel change in a moment to a snake-haired fury, lost all his sublime faith in love and goodness. He rushed at the wall like an insane little goat, battered his head screaming again and again, wished desperately that his constricted and overloaded heart would burst, that something in him would break, that somehow, bloodily, he might escape the stifling prisonhouse of his life.

This satisfied her desire; it was what deeply she had wanted—she had found purging release in her savage attack upon him, and now she could drain herself cleanly in a wild smother of affection. She would seize him, struggling and screaming, in her long arms, plaster kisses all over his red mad face, soothing him with hearty flattery addressed in the third person:

"Why, he didn't think I meant it, did he? Didn't he know I was only joking? Why, he's strong as a little bull, isn't he? He's a regular little giant, that's what he is. Why, he's perfectly wild, isn't he? His eyes popping out of his head. I thought he was going to knock a hole in the wall.—Yes, ma'am. Why, law me, yes, child. It's *good* soup," resorting to her broad mimicry in order to make him laugh. And he would laugh against his will between his sobs, in a greater torture because of this agony of affection and reconciliation than because of the abuse.

Presently, when he had grown quiet, she would send him off to the store for pickles, cakes, cold bottled drinks; he would depart with red eyes, his cheeks furrowed dirtily by his tears, wondering desperately as he went down the street why the thing had happened, and drawing his foot sharply off the ground and craning his neck convulsively as shame burnt in him.

There was in Helen a restless hatred of dulness, respectability. Yet she was at heart a severely conventional person, in spite of her occasional vulgarity, which was merely a manifestation of her restless energy, a very naïve, a childishly innocent person about even the simple wickedness of the village. She had several devoted young men on her list—plain, hard-drinking country types: one, a native, lean, red-faced, alcoholic, a city surveyor, who adored her; another, a strapping florid blond from the Tennessee coal fields; another, a young South Carolinian, townsman of her older sister's fiancé.

These young men—Hugh Parker, Jim Phelps, and Joe Cathcart, were innocently devoted; they liked her tireless and dominant energy, the eager monopoly of her tongue, her big sincerity and deep kindliness. She played and sang for them—threw all her energy into entertaining them. They brought her boxes of candy, little presents, were divided jealously among themselves, but united in their affirmation that she was "a fine girl."

And she would get Jim Phelps and Hugh Parker to bring her a drink of whisky as well: she had begun to depend on small potations of alcohol for the stimulus it gave her fevered body—a small drink was enough to operate electrically in her blood: it renewed her, energized her, gave her a temporary and hectic vitality. Thus, although she never drank much at a time and showed, beyond the renewed vitality and gaiety, no sign of intoxication, she nibbled at the bottle.

"I'll take a drink whenever I can get it," she said.

She liked, almost invariably, young fast women. She liked the hectic pleasure of their lives, the sense of danger, their humor and liberality. She was drawn magnetically to all the wedded harlotry, which, escaping the Sunday discipline of a Southern village, and the Saturday lust of sodden husbands, came gaily to Altamont in summer. She liked people who, as she said, "didn't mind taking a little drink now and then."

She liked Mary Thomas, a tall jolly young prostitute who came from Kentucky: she was a manicurist in an Altamont Hotel.

"There are two things I want to see," said Mary, "a rooster's you-know-what and a hen's what-is-it." She was full of loud compelling laughter. She had a small room with a sleeping porch, at the front of the house upstairs. Eugene brought her some cigarettes once: she stood before the window in a thin petticoat, her feet wide apart, her long sensual legs outlined against the light.

Helen wore her dresses, hats, and silk stockings. Sometimes they drank together. And, with humorous sentimentality, she defended her.

"Well, she's no hypocrite. That's one thing sure. She doesn't care who knows it." Or,

"She's no worse than a lot of your little goody-goodies, if the truth's known. She's only more open about it."

Or again, irritated at some implied criticism of her own friendliness with the girl, she would say angrily:

"What do you know about her? You'd better be careful how you talk about people. You'll get into trouble about it some day."

Nevertheless, she was scrupulous in her public avoidance of the girl and, illogically, in a moment of unreasoning annoyance she would attack Eliza:

"Why do you keep such people in your house, mama? Every one in town knows about her. Your place is getting the reputation of a regular chippyhouse all over town."

Eliza pursed her lips angrily:

"I don't pay any attention to them," she said. "I consider myself as good as any one. I hold my head up, and I expect every one else to do likewise. You don't catch me associating with them."

It was part of her protective mechanism. She pretended to be proudly oblivious to any disagreeable circumstance which brought her in money. As a result, by that curious impalpable advertisement which exists among easy women, Dixieland became known to them—they floated casually in—the semi-public, clandestine prostitutes of a tourist town.

Helen had drifted apart from most of her friends of high school days—the hard-working plain-faced Genevieve Pratt, daughter of a schoolmaster, "Teeney" Duncan, Gertrude Brown. Her companions now were livelier, if somewhat more vulgar, young women—Grace Deshaye, a plumber's daughter, an opulent blonde; Pearl Hines, daughter of a Baptist saddle-maker: she was heavy of body and face, but she had a powerful ragtime singing voice.

Her closest companion, however, was a girl whose name was Nan Gudger: she was a brisk, slender, vital girl, with a waist so tightly corsetted that a man's hands might go around it. She was the trusted, accurate, infallible bookkeeper of a grocery store. She contributed largely to the support of her family—a mother whom Eugene looked upon with sick flesh, because of the heavy goitre that sagged from her loose neck; a crippled sister who moved about the house by means of crutches and the propulsive strength of her powerful shoulders; and two brothers, hulking young thugs of twenty and eighteen years, who always bore upon their charmed bodies fresh knife-wounds, blue lumps and swellings, and other marks of their fights in poolroom and brothel. They lived in a two-story shack of rickety lumber on Clingman Street: the women worked uncomplainingly in the support of the young men. Eugene went here with Helen often: she liked the vulgarity, the humor, the excitement of their lives—and it amused her particularly to listen to Mary's obscene earthy conversation.

Upon the first of every month, Nan and Mary gave to the boys a portion of their earnings, for pocket money and for their monthly visit to the women of Eagle Crescent.

"Oh, *surely* not, Mary? Good heavens!" said Helen with eager unbelief.

"Why, hell yes, honey," said Mary, grinning her coarse drawl, taking her snuff-stick out of the brown corner of her mouth, and holding it in her strong hand. "We always give the boys money fer a woman once a month."

"Oh, *no!* You're joking," Helen said, laughing.

"Good God, child, don't you know *that?*" said Mary, spitting inaccurately at the fire, "Hit's good fer their health. They'd git sick if we didn't."

Eugene began to slide helplessly toward the floor. He got an instant panorama of the whole astonishing picture of humor and solemn superstition—the women contributing their money, in the interests of sanitation and health, to the debauches of the two grinning hairy nicotined young louts.

"What're you laughin' at, son?" said Mary, gooching him roughly in the ribs, as he lay panting and prostrate. "You ain't hardly out of didies yet."

She had all the savage passion of a mountaineer: crippled, she lived in the coarse heat of her brothers' lust. They were crude, kindly, ignorant, and murderous people. Nan was scrupulously respectable and well-mannered: she had thick negroid lips that turned outward, and hearty tropical laughter. She replaced the disreputable furniture of the house by new shiny Grand Rapids chairs and tables. There was a varnished bookcase, forever locked, stored with stiff sets of unread books—*The Harvard Classics,* and a cheap encyclopædia.

When Mrs. Selborne first came to Dixieland from the hot South she was only twenty-three but she looked older. Ripeness with her was all: she was a tall heavy-bodied blonde, well kept and elegant. She moved leisurely with a luxurious sensual swing of the body: her smile was tender and full of vague allurement, her voice gentle, her sudden laughter, bubbling out of midnight secrecy, rich and full. She was one of several handsome and bacchic daughters of a depleted South Carolinian of good family: she had married at sixteen a red heavy man who came and went from her incomparable table, eating rapidly and heartily, muttering, when pressed, a few shy-sullen words, and departing to the closed leather-and-horse smell of his little office in the livery-stable he owned. She had two children by him, both girls: she moved with wasted stealth around all the quiet slander of a South Carolina mill-town, committing adultery carefully with a mill owner, a banker, and a lumber man, walking circumspectly with her tender blonde smile by day past all the sly smiles of town and trade, knowing that the earth was mined below her feet, and that her name, with clerk and merchant, was a sign for secret laughter. The natives, the men in particular, treated her with even more elaborate respect than a woman is usually given in a Southern town, but their eyes behind the courteous unctions of their masks, were shiny with invitation.

Eugene felt when he first saw her, and knew about her, that she would never be caught and always known. His love for her was desperate. She was the living symbol of his desire—the dim vast figure of love and maternity, ageless and autumnal, waiting, corn-haired, deep-breasted, blond of limb, in the ripe fields of harvest—Demeter, Helen, the ripe exhaustless and renewing energy, the cradling nurse of weariness and disenchantment. Below the thrust of Spring, the sharp knife, the voices of the young girls in the darkness, the sharp inchoate expectancies of youth, his deep desire burned inextinguishably: something turned him always to the older women.

When Mrs. Selborne first came to Dixieland her oldest child was seven years old, her youngest five. She received a small check from her husband every week, and a substantial one from the lumber man. She brought a negro girl with her: she was lavish in her dispensations to the negress, and to her children:

this wastefulness, ease of living, and her rich seductive laughter fascinated Helen, drew her to the older woman.

And, at night, as Eugene listened to the low sweet voice of the woman, heard the rich sensual burst of her laughter, as she sat in the dark porch with a commercial traveller or some merchant in the town, his blood grew bitter with the morality of jealousy: he withered with his hurt, thought of her little sleeping children, and, with a passionate sense of fraternity, of her gulled husband. He dreamed of himself as the redemptive hero, saving her in an hour of great danger, making her penitent with grave reproof, accepting purely the love she offered.

In the morning, he breathed the seminal odor of her fresh bathed body as she passed him, gazed desperately into the tender sensuality of her face and, with a sense of unreality, wondered what change darkness wrought in this untelling face.

Steve returned from New Orleans after a year of vagabondage. The old preposterous swagger, following the ancient whine, reappeared as soon as he felt himself safely established at home again.

"Stevie doesn't have to work," said he. "He's smart enough to make the others work for him." This was his defiance to his record of petty forgeries against Gant: he saw himself as a clever swindler although he had never had courage to swindle any one except his father. People were reading the Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford stories: there was an immense admiration for this romantic criminal.

Steve was now a young man in the first twenties. He was somewhat above the middle height, bumpy of face and sallow of skin, with a light pleasing tenor voice. Eugene had a feeling of disgust and horror whenever his oldest brother returned: he knew that those who were physically least able to defend themselves, which included Eliza and himself, would bear the brunt of his whining, petty bullying, and drunken obscenity. He did not mind the physical abuse so much as he did its cowardly stealth, weakness, and slobbering reconciliations.

Once, Gant, making one of his sporadic efforts to get his son fixed in employment, had sent him out to a country graveyard to put up a small monument. Eugene was sent along. Steve worked steadily in the hot sun for an hour, growing more and more irritable because of the heat, the rank weedy stench of the graveyard, and his own deep antipathy to work. Eugene waited intensely for the attack he knew was coming.

"What are you standing there for?" screamed Big Brother at length, looking up in an agony of petulance. He struck sharply at the boy's shin with a heavy wrench he held in his hand, knocking him to the ground, and crippling him for the moment. Immediately, he was palsied, not with remorse, but with fear that he had injured him badly and would be discovered.

"You're not hurt, are you, buddy? You're not hurt?" he began in a quivering voice, putting his unclean yellow hands upon Eugene. And he made the effort at reconciliation Eugene so dreaded, whimpering, blowing his foul breath upon his brother's cringing flesh, and entreating him to say nothing of the occurrence when he went home. Eugene became violently nauseated: the stale odor of Steve's body, the clammy and unhealthy sweat that stank with nicotine, the touch of his tainted flesh filled him with horror.

There still remained, however, in the cast and carriage of his head, in his swagger walk, the ghost of his ruined boyishness: women were sometimes attracted to him. It was his fortune, therefore, to secure Mrs. Selborne for his mistress the first summer she came to Dixieland. At night her rich laughter welled up from the dark porch, they walked through the quiet leafy streets, they went to Riverside together, walking beyond the lights of the carnival into the dark sandy paths by the river.

But, as her friendship with Helen ripened, as she saw the revulsion of the Gants against their brother, and as she began to see what damage she had already done to herself by her union with this braggart who had brandished her name through every poolroom in town as a tribute to his own power, she cast him off, quietly, implacably, tenderly. When she returned now, summer by summer, she met with her innocent and unwitting smile all of his obscene innuendoes, his heavily suggestive threats, his bitter revelations behind her back. Her affection for Helen was genuine, but it was also, she felt, strategic and useful. The girl introduced her to handsome young men, gave parties and dances at Gant's and Eliza's for her, was really a partner in her intrigues, assuring her of privacy, silence, and darkness, and defending her angrily when the evil whispering began.

"What do you know about her? You don't know what she does. You'd better be careful how you talk about her. She's got a husband to defend her, you know. You'll get your head shot off some day." Or, more doubtfully:

"Well, I don't care what they say, I like her. She's mighty sweet. After all, what can we say about her for sure? No one can *prove* anything on her."

And in the winters now she made short visits to the South Carolina town where Mrs. Selborne lived, returning with an enthusiastic description of her reception, the parties "in her honor," the food, the lavish entertainment. Mrs. Selborne lived in the same town as Joe Gambell, the young clerk to whom Daisy was engaged. He was full of sly hints about the woman, but before her his manner was obsequious, confused, reverential, and he accepted without complaint the presents of food and clothing which she sent him after their marriage.

Daisy had been married in the month of June following Eliza's purchase of Dixieland: the wedding was arranged on a lavish scale, and took place in the big dining-room of the house. Gant and his two older sons grinned sheepishly in unaccustomed evening dress, the Pentlands, faithful in their attendance at weddings and funerals, sent gifts and came. Will and Pett gave a heavy set of carving steels.

"I hope you always have something to use them on," said Will, flensing his hand, and winking at Joe Gambell.

Eugene remembered weeks of frantic preparation, dress fittings, rehearsals, the hysteria of Daisy, who stared at her nails until they went blue, and the final splendor of the last two days —the arriving gifts, the house, unnaturally cheerful with rich carpets and flowers, the perilous moment when their lives joined, the big packed dining-room, the droning interminable Scotch voice of the Presbyterian minister, the mounting triumph of the music when the grocery clerk got his bride. Later, the confusion, the greetings, the hysteria of the women. Daisy sobbing uncontrollably in the arms of a distant cousin, Beth Pentland, who had come up with her hearty red husband, the owner of a chain of small groceries in a South Carolina town, bringing gifts and a giant watermelon, and whose own grief was enhanced by the discovery, after the wedding, that the dress she had worked on weeks in advance she had put on, in her frenzy, wrong side out.

Thus Daisy passed more or less definitely out of Eugene's life, although he was to see her briefly on visits, but with decreasing frequency, in the years that followed. The grocery clerk was making the one daring gesture of his life: he was breaking away from the cotton town, in which all the years of his life had been passed, and from the long lazy hours of grocery clerks, the languorous gossip of lank cotton farmers and townsmen, to which he had been used. He had found employment as a commercial traveller for a food products company: his headquarters was to be in Augusta, Georgia, but he was to travel into the far South.

This rooting up of his life, this adventure into new lands, the effort to improve his fortune and his state, was his wedding gift to his wife—a bold one, but imperilled already by distrust, fear, and his peasant suspicion of new scenes, new faces, new departures, of any life that differed from that of his village.

"There's no place like Henderson," said he, with complacent and annoying fidelity, referring to that haven of enervation, red clay, ignorance, slander, and superstition, in whose effluent rays he had been reared.

But he went to Augusta, and began his new life with Daisy in a lodging house. She was twenty-one, a slender, blushing girl who played the piano beautifully, accurately, academically, with a rippling touch, and with no imagination. Eugene could never remember her very well.

In the early autumn after her marriage, Gant made the journey to Augusta, taking Eugene with him. The inner excitement of both was intense; the hot wait at the sleepy junction of Spartanburg, the ride in the dilapidated day coaches of the branch line that ran to Augusta, the hot baked autumnal land, rolling piedmont and pine woods, every detail of the landscape they drank in with thirsty adventurous eyes. Gant's roving spirit was parched for lack of travel: for Eugene, Saint Louis was a faint unreality, but there burned in him a vision of the opulent South, stranger even than his passionate winter nostalgia for the snow-bound North, which the drifted but short-lived snows in Altamont, the seizure of the unaccustomed moment for sledding and skating on the steep hills awakened in him with a Northern desire, a desire for the dark, the storm, the winds that roar across the earth and the triumphant comfort of warm walls which only a Southerner perhaps can know.

And he saw the town of Augusta first not in the drab hues of reality, but as one who bursts a window into the faery pageant of the world, as one who has lived in prison, and finds life and the earth in rosy dawn, as one who has lived in all the fabulous imagery of books, and finds in a journey only an extension and verification of it—so did he see Augusta, with the fresh washed eyes of a child, with glory, with enchantment.

They were gone two weeks. He remembered chiefly the brown stains of the recent flood, which had flowed through the town and inundated its lower floors, the broad main street, the odorous and gleaming drug-store, scented to him with all the spices of his fancy, the hills and fields of Aiken, in South Carolina, where he sought vainly for John D. Rockefeller, a legendary prince who, he heard, went there for sport, marvelling that two States could join imperceptibly, without visible markings, and the cotton gin where he saw the great press mash the huge raw bales cleanly into tight bundles half their former size.

Once, some children on the street had taunted him because of his long hair, and he had fallen into a cursing fury; once, in a rage at some quarrel with his sister, he set off on a world adventure, walking furiously for hours down a country road by the river and cotton fields, captured finally by Gant who sought for him in a hired rig.

They went to the theatre: it was one of the first plays he had seen. The play was a biblical one, founded on the story of Saul and Jonathan, and he had whispered to Gant from scene to scene the trend of coming events—a precocity which pleased his father mightily, and to which he referred for months.

Just before they came home, Joe Gambell, in a fit of concocted petulance, resigned his position, and announced that he was returning to Henderson. His adventure had lasted three months.

XIII

In the years that followed, up to his eleventh or twelfth year when he could no longer travel on half fares, Eugene voyaged year by year into the rich mysterious South. Eliza, who, during her first winter at Dixieland, had been stricken by severe attacks of rheumatism, induced partly by kidney trouble, which caused her flesh to swell puffily, and which was diagnosed by the doctor as Bright's Disease, began to make extensive, although economical, voyages into Florida and Arkansas in search of health and, rather vaguely, in search of wealth.

She always spoke hopefully of the possibility of opening a boarding-house at some tropical winter resort, during the seasons there and in Altamont. In winter now, she rented Dixieland for a few months, sometimes for a year, although she really had no intention of allowing the place to slip through her fingers during the profitable summer season: usually, she let the place go, more or less deliberately, to some unscrupulous adventuress of lodging houses, good for a month's or two months' rent, but incapable of the sustained effort that would support it for a longer time. On her return from her journey, with rents in arrears, or with some other violation of the contract as an entering wedge, Eliza would surge triumphantly into battle, making a forced entrance with police, plain-clothes men, warrants, summonses, writs, injunctions, and all the other artillery of legal warfare, possessing herself forcibly, and with vindictive pleasure, of her property.

But she turned always into the South—the North for her was a land which she threatened often to explore, but which secretly she held in suspicion: there was in her no deep animosity because of an old war, her feeling was rather one of fear, distrust, alienation—the "Yankee" to whom she humorously referred was foreign and remote. So, she turned always into the South, the South that burned like Dark Helen in Eugene's blood, and she always took him with her. They still slept together.

His feeling for the South was not so much historic as it was of the core and desire of dark romanticism—that unlimited and inexplicable drunkenness, the magnetism of some men's blood that takes them into the heart of the heat, and beyond that, into the polar and emerald cold of the South as swiftly as it took the heart of that incomparable romanticist who wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* beyond which there is nothing. And this desire of his was unquestionably enhanced by all he had read and visioned, by the romantic halo that his school history cast over the section, by the whole fantastic distortion of that period where people were said to live in "mansions," and slavery was a benevolent institution, conducted to a constant banjo-strumming, the strewn largesses of the colonel and the shuffle-dance of his happy dependents, where all women were pure, gentle, and beautiful, all men chivalrous and brave, and the Rebel horde a company of swagger, death-mocking cavaliers. Years later, when he could no longer think of the barren spiritual wilderness, the hostile and murderous intrenchment against all new life—when their cheap mythology, their legend of the charm of their manner, the aristocratic culture of their lives, the quaint sweetness of their drawl, made him writhe—when he could think of no return to their life and its swarming superstition without weariness and horror, so great was his fear of the legend, his fear of their antagonism, that he still pretended the most fanatic devotion to them, excusing his Northern residence on grounds of necessity rather than desire.

Finally, it occurred to him that these people had given him nothing, that neither their love nor their hatred could injure him, that he owed them nothing, and he determined that he would say so, and repay their insolence with a curse. And he did.

So did his boundaries stretch into enchantment—into fabulous and solitary wonder broken only by Eliza's stingy practicality, by her lack of magnificence in a magnificent world, by the meals of sweet rolls and milk and butter in an untidy room, by the shoe boxes of luncheon carried on the trains and opened in the diner, after a lengthy inspection of the menu had led to the ordering of coffee, by the interminable quarrels over price and charges in almost every place they went, by her commands to him to "scrooch up" when the conductor came through for the tickets, for he was a tall lank boy, and his half-fare age might be called to question.

She took him to Florida in the late winter following Gant's return from Augusta: they went to Tampa first, and, a few days later, to Saint Petersburg. He plowed through the loose deep sand of the streets, fished interminably with jolly old men at the end of the long pier, devoured a chest full of dime novels that he found in the rooms she had rented in a private house. They left abruptly, after a terrific quarrel with the old Cracker who ran the place, who thought himself tricked out of the best part of a season's rent, and hurried off to South Carolina on receipt of a hysterical message from Daisy which bade her mother to "come at once." They arrived in the dingy little town, which was sticky with wet clay, and clammy with rain, in late March: Daisy's first child, a boy, had been born the day before. Eliza, annoyed at what she considered the useless disruption of her holiday, quarrelled bitterly with her daughter a day or two after her arrival, and departed for Altamont with the declaration, which Daisy ironically applauded, that she would never return again. But she did.

The following winter she went to New Orleans at the season of the Mardi Gras, taking her youngest with her. Eugene remembered the huge cisterns for rain-water, in the back yard of Aunt Mary's house, the heavy window-rattling thunder of Mary's snores at night, and the vast pageantry of carnival on Canal Street: the storied floats, the smiling beauties, the marching troops, the masks grotesque and fantastical. And once more he saw ships at anchor at the foot of Canal Street; and their tall keels looked over on the street behind the sea walls; and in the cemeteries all the graves were raised above the ground "because," said Oll, Gant's nephew, "the water rots 'em."

And he remembered the smells of the French market, the heavy fragrance of the coffee he drank there, and the foreign Sunday gaiety of the city's life—the theatres open, the sound of hammer and saw, the gay festivity of crowds. He visited the Boyles, old guests at Dixieland, who lived in the old French quarter, sleeping at night with Frank Boyle in a vast dark room lighted dimly with tapers: they had as cook an ancient negress who spoke only French, and who returned from the Market early in the morning bearing a huge basket loaded with vegetables, tropical fruits, fowls, meats. She cooked strange delicious food that he had never tasted before—heavy gumbo, garnished steaks, sauced fowls.

And he looked upon the huge yellow snake of the river, dreaming of its distant shores, the myriad estuaries lush with tropical growth that fed it, all the romantic life of plantation and canefields that fringed it, of moonlight, of dancing darkies on the levee, of slow lights on the gilded river boat, and the perfumed flesh of black-haired women, musical wraiths below the phantom drooping trees.

They had but shortly returned from Mardi Gras when, one howling night in winter, as he lay asleep at Gant's, the house was wakened by his father's terrible cries. Gant had been drinking heavily, day after fearful day. Eugene had been sent in the afternoons to his shop to fetch him home, and at sundown, with Jannadeau's aid, had brought him, behind the negro's spavined horse, roaring drunk to his house. There followed the usual routine of soup-feeding, undressing, and holding him in check until Doctor McGuire arrived, thrust his needle deeply into Gant's stringy arm, left sleeping-powders, and departed. The girl was exhausted; Gant himself had ravaged his strength, and had been brought down by two or three painful attacks of rheumatism.

Now, he awoke in the dark, possessed by his terror and agony, for the whole right side of his body was paralyzed by such pain as he did not know existed. He cursed and supplicated God alternately in his pain and terror. For days doctor and nurse strove with him, hoping that the leaping inflammation would not strike at his heart. He was gnarled, twisted, and bent with a savage attack of inflammatory rheumatism. As soon as he had recovered sufficiently to travel, he departed, under Helen's care, for Hot Springs. Almost savagely, she drove all other assistance from him, devoting every minute of the day to his care: they were gone six weeks—occasionally post-cards and letters describing a life of hotels, mineral baths, sickness and lameness, and the sport of the blooded rich, came to add new colors to Eugene's horizon: when they returned Gant was able again to walk, the rheumatism had been boiled from his limbs, but his right hand, gnarled and stiff, was permanently crippled. He was never again able to close it, and there was something strangely chastened in his manner, a gleam of awe and terror in his eyes.

But the union between Gant and his daughter was finally consummated. Before Gant lay, half-presaged, a road of pain and terror which led on to death, but as his great strength dwindled, palsied, broke along that road, she went with him inch by inch, welding beyond life, beyond death, beyond memory, the bond that linked them.

"I'd have died if it hadn't been for that girl," he said over and over. "She saved my life. I couldn't get along without her." And he boasted again and again of her devotion and loyalty, of the expenses of his journey, of the hotels, the wealth, the life they both had seen.

And, as the legend of Helen's goodness and devotion grew, and his dependence upon her got further advertisement, Eliza pursed her lips more and more thoughtfully, wept sometimes into the spitting grease of a pan, smiled, beneath her wide red nose, a smile tremulous, bitter, terribly hurt.

"I'll show them," she wept. "I'll show them." And she rubbed thoughtfully at a red itching patch that had appeared during the year upon the back of her left hand.

She went to Hot Springs in the winter that followed. They stopped at Memphis for a day or two: Steve was at work there in a paint store; he slipped quickly in and out of saloons, as he took Eugene about the city, leaving the boy outside for a moment while he went "in here to see a fellow"—a "fellow" who always sent him forth, Eugene thought, with an added impetuosity to his swagger.

Dizzily they crossed the river: at night he saw the small bleared shacks of Arkansas set in malarial fields.

Eliza sent him to one of the public schools of Hot Springs: he plunged heavily into the bewildering new world—performed brilliantly, and won the affection of the young woman who taught him, but paid the penalty of the stranger to all the hostile and banded little creatures of the class. Before his first month was out, he had paid desperately for his ignorance of their customs.

Eliza boiled herself out at the baths daily; sometimes, he went along with her, leaving her with a sensation of drunken independence, while he went into the men's quarter, stripping himself in a cool room, entering thence a hot one lined with couches, shutting himself in a steam-closet where he felt himself momently dwindling into the raining puddle of sweat at his feet, to emerge presently on trembling legs and to be rolled and kneaded about magnificently in a huge tub by a powerful grinning negro. Later, languorous, but with a feeling of deep purification, he lay out on one of the couches, victoriously his own man in a man's world. They talked from couch to couch, or walked pot-belliedly about, sashed coyly with bath towels—malarial Southerners with malarial drawls, paunch-eyed alcoholics, purple-skinned gamblers, and broken down prizefighters. He liked the smell of steam and of the sweaty men.

Eliza sent him out on the streets at once with *The Saturday Evening Post.*

"It won't hurt you to do a little light work after school," said she. And as he trudged off with his sack slung from his neck, she would call after him:

"Spruce up, boy! Spruce up! Throw your shoulders back. Make folks think you're somebody." And she gave him a pocketful of printed cards, which bore this inscription:

SPEND YOUR SUMMERS AT

DIXIELAND

In Beautiful Altamont,

America's Switzerland.

Rates Reasonable—Both Transient and Tourist.

Apply Eliza E. Gant, Prop.

"You've got to help me drum up some trade, if we're to live, boy," she said again, with the lip-pursing, mouth-tremulous jocularity that was coming to wound him so deeply, because he felt it was only an obvious mask for a more obvious insincerity.

He writhed as he saw himself finally a toughened pachyderm in Eliza's world—sprucing up confidently, throwing his shoulders back proudly, making people "think he was somebody" as he cordially acknowledged an introduction by producing a card setting forth the joys of life in Altamont and at Dixieland, and seized every opening in social relations for the purpose of "drumming up trade." He hated the jargon of the profession, which she had picked up somewhere long before, and which she used constantly with such satisfaction—smacking her lips as she spoke of "transients," or of "drumming up trade." In him, as in Gant, there was a silent horror of selling for money the bread of one's table, the shelter of one's walls, to the guest, the stranger, the unknown friend from out the world; to the sick, the weary, the lonely, the broken, the knave, the harlot, and the fool.

Thus, lost in the remote Ozarks, he wandered up Central Avenue, fringed on both sides by the swift-sloping hills, for him, by the borders of enchantment, the immediate portals of a land of timeless and never-ending faery. He drank endlessly the water that came smoking from the earth, hoping somehow to wash himself clean from all pollution, beginning his everlasting fantasy of the miraculous spring, or the bath, neck-high, of curative mud, which would draw out of a man's veins each drop of corrupted blood, dry up in him a cancerous growth, dwindle and absorb a cyst, remove all scorbutic blemishes, scoop and suck and thread away the fibrous slime of all disease, leaving him again with the perfect flesh of an animal.

And he gazed for hours into the entrances of the fashionable hotels, staring at the ladies' legs upon the verandas, watching the great ones of the land at their recreations, thinking, with a pang of wonder, that here were the people of Chambers, of Phillips, of all the society novelists, leading their godlike lives in flesh, recording their fiction. He was deeply reverential before the grand manner of these books, particularly before the grand manner of the English books: these people loved, but not as other people, elegantly; their speech was subtle, delicate, exquisite; even in their passions there was no gross lust or strong appetite—they were incapable of the vile thoughts or the meaty desire of common people. As he looked at the comely thighs of the young women on horses, fascinated to see their shapely legs split over the strong good smell of a horse, he wondered if the warm sinuous vibration of the great horse-back excited them, and what their love was like. The preposterous elegance of their manner in the books awed him: he saw seduction consummated in kid gloves, to the accompaniment of subtle repartee. Such thoughts, when he had them, filled him with shame at his own baseness—he imagined for these people a love conducted beyond all the laws of nature, achieving the delight of animals or of common men by the electrical touch of a finger, the flicker of an eye, the intonation of a phrase—exquisitely and incorruptibly.

And as they looked at his remote fabulous face, more strange now that its thick fringing curls had been shorn, they bought of him, paying him several times his fee, with the lazy penitence of wasters.

Great fish within the restaurant windows swam in glass wells—eels coiled snakily, white-bellied trout veered and sank: he dreamed of strange rich foods within.

And sometimes men returned in carriages from the distant river, laden with great fish, and he wondered if he would ever see that river. All that lay around him, near but unexplored, filled him with desire and longing.

And later, again, along the sandy coast of Florida, with Eliza, he wandered down the narrow lanes of Saint Augustine, raced along the hard packed beach of Daytona, scoured the green lawns of Palm Beach, before the hotels, for cocoanuts, which Eliza desired as souvenirs, filling a brown tow sack with them and walking, with the bag hung from his shoulders, down the interminable aisles of the Royal Poinciana or the Breakers, target of scorn, and scandal, and amusement from slave and prince; or traversed the spacious palm-cool walks that cut the peninsula, to see, sprawled in the sensual loose sand the ladies' silken legs, the brown lean bodies of the men, the long sea-plunges in the unending scroll-work of the emerald and infinite sea, which had beat in his brain from his father's shells, which had played at his mountain heart, but which never, until now, had he seen. Through the spattered sunlight of the palms, in the smooth walks, princess and lord were wheeled: in latticed bar-rooms, droning with the buzzing fans, men drank from glacéd tall glasses.

Or again, they came to Jacksonville, lived there for several weeks near Pett and Greeley; he studied under a little crippled man from Harvard, going to lunch with his teacher at a buffet, where the man consumed beer and pretzels. Eliza protested the tuition when she left: the cripple shrugged his shoulders, took what she had to offer. Eugene twisted his neck about, and lifted his foot from the ground.

Thus did he see first, he the hill-bound, the sky-girt, of whom the mountains were his masters, the fabulous South. The picture of flashing field, of wood, and hill, stayed in his heart forever: lost in the dark land, he lay the night-long through within his berth, watching the shadowy and phantom South flash by, sleeping at length, and waking suddenly, to see cool lakes in Florida at dawn, standing quietly as if they had waited from eternity for this meeting; or hearing, as the train in the dark hours of morning slid into Savannah, the strange quiet voices of the men upon the platform, the boding faint echoes of the station, or seeing, in pale dawn, the phantom woods, a rutted lane, a cow, a boy, a drab, dull-eyed against a cottage door, glimpsed, at this moment of rushing time, for which all life had been aplot, to flash upon the window and be gone.

The commonness of all things in the earth he remembered with a strange familiarity—he dreamed of the quiet roads, the moonlit woodlands, and he thought that some day he would come to them on foot, and find them there unchanged, in all the wonder of recognition. They had existed for him anciently and forever.

Eugene was almost twelve years old.

PART II

XIV

The plum-tree, black and brittle, rocks stiffly in winter wind. Her million little twigs are frozen in spears of ice. But in the Spring, lithe and heavy, she will bend under her great load of fruit and blossoms. She will grow young again. Red plums will ripen, will be shaken desperately upon the tiny stems. They will fall bursted on the loamy warm wet earth; when the wind blows in the orchard the air will be filled with dropping plums; the night will be filled with the sound of their dropping, and a great tree of birds will sing, burgeoning, blossoming richly, filling the air also with warm-throated plum-dropping bird-notes.

The harsh hill-earth has moistly thawed and softened, rich soaking rain falls, fresh-bladed tender grass like soft hair growing sparsely streaks the land.

My Brother Ben's face, thought Eugene, is like a piece of slightly yellow ivory; his high white head is knotted fiercely by his old man's scowl; his mouth is like a knife, his smile the flicker of light across a blade. His face is like a blade, and a knife, and a flicker of light: it is delicate and fierce, and scowls beautifully forever, and when he fastens his hard white fingers and his scowling eyes upon a thing he wants to fix, he sniffs with sharp and private concentration through his long pointed nose. Thus women, looking, feel a well of tenderness for his pointed, bumpy, always scowling face: his hair shines like that of a young boy—it is crinkled and crisp as lettuce.

Into the April night-and-morning streets goes Ben. The night is brightly pricked with cool and tender stars. The orchard stirs leafily in the short fresh wind. Ben prowls softly out of the sleeping house. His thin bright face is dark within the orchard. There is a smell of nicotine and shoe leather under the young blossoms. His pigeon-toed tan shoes ring musically up the empty streets. Lazily slaps the water in the fountain on the Square; all the firemen are asleep—but Big Bill Merrick, the brave cop, hog-jowled and red, leans swinishly over mince-pie and coffee in Uneeda Lunch. The warm good ink-smell beats in rich waves into the street: a whistling train howls off into the Springtime South.

By the cool orchards in the dark the paper-carriers go. The copper legs of negresses in their dark dens stir. The creek brawls cleanly.

A new one, Number 6, heard boys speak of Foxy:

"Who's Foxy?" asked Number 6.

"Foxy's a bastard, Number 6. Don't let him catch you."

"The bastard caught me three times last week. In the Greek's every time. Why can't they let us eat?"

Number 3 thought of Friday morning--he had the Niggertown route.

"How many—3?"

"One hundred and sixty-two."

"How many Dead Heads you got, son?" said Mr. Randall cynically. "Do you ever try to collect from them?" he added, thumbing through the book.

"He takes it out in Poon-Tang," said Foxy, grinning. "A week's subscription free for a dose."

"What you got to say about it?" asked Number 3 belligerently. "You've been knocking down on them for six years."

"Jazz 'em all if you like," said Randall, "but get the money. Ben, I want you to go round with him Saturday."

Ben laughed silently and cynically into the air:

"Oh, my God!" he said. "Do you expect me to check up on the little thug? He's been knocking down on you for the last six months."

"All right! All right!" said Randall, annoyed. "That's what I want you to find out."

"Oh, for God's sake, Randall," said Ben contemptuously, "he's got niggers on that book who've been dead for five years. That's what you get for keeping every little crook that comes along."

"If you don't get a move on, 3, I'll give your route to another boy," said Randall.

"Hell, get another boy. I don't care," said Number 3, toughly.

"Oh, for God's sake! Listen to this, won't you?" said Ben, laughing thinly and nodding to his angel, indicating Number 3 with a scowling jerk of his head.

"Yes, listen to this, won't you! That's what I said," Number 3 answered pugnaciously.

"All right, little boy. Run on and deliver your papers now, before you get hurt," said Ben, turning his scowl quietly upon him and looking at him blackly for a moment. "Ah, you little crook," he said with profound loathing, "I have a kid brother who's worth six like you."

Spring lay strewn lightly like a fragrant gauzy scarf upon the earth; the night was a cool bowl of lilac darkness, filled with fresh orchard scents.

Gant slept heavily, rattling the loose window-sash with deep rasping snores; with short explosive thunders, ripping the lilac night, 36 began to climb Saluda. She bucked helplessly like a goat, her wheels spun furiously on the rails, Tom Cline stared seriously down into the milky boiling creek, and waited. She slipped, spun, held, ploughed slowly up, like a straining mule, into the dark. Content, he leaned far out the cab and looked: the starlight glimmered faintly on the rails. He ate a thick sandwich of cold buttered fried meat, tearing it raggedly and glueily staining it under his big black fingers. There was a smell of dogwood and laurel in the cool slow passage of the world. The cars clanked humpily across the spur; the switchman, bathed murkily in the hot yellow light of his perilous bank-edged hut, stood sullen at the switch.

Arms spread upon his cab-sill, chewing thoughtfully, Tom, goggle-eyed, looked carefully down at him. They had never spoken. Then in silence he turned and took the milk-bottle, half full of cold coffee, that his fireman offered him. He washed his food down with the large easy gurgling swallows of a bishop.

At 18 Valley Street, the red shack-porch, slime-scummed with a greasy salve of yellow negroid mud, quaked rottenly. Number 3's square-folded ink-fresh paper struck flat against the door, falling on its edge stiffly to the porch like a block of light wood. Within, May Corpening stirred nakedly, muttering as if doped and moving her heavy copper legs, in the fetid bed-warmth, with the slow noise of silk.

Harry Tugman lit a Camel, drawing the smoke deep into his powerful ink-stained lungs as he watched the press run down. His bare arms were heavy-muscled as his presses. He dropped comfortably into his pliant creaking chair and tilted back, casually scanning the warm pungent sheet. Luxurious smoke steamed slowly from his nostrils. He cast the sheet away.

"Christ!" he said. "What a makeup!"

Ben came down stairs, moody, scowling, and humped over toward the ice-box.

"For God's sake, Mac," he called out irritably to the Make-up Man, as he scowled under the lifted lid, "don't you ever keep anything except root-beer and sour milk?"

"What do you want, for Christ's sake?"

"I'd like to get a Coca-Cola once in a while. You know," he said bitingly, "Old Man Candler down in Atlanta is still making it."

Harry Tugman cast his cigarette away.

"They haven't got the news up here yet, Ben," said he. "You'll have to wait till the excitement over Lee's surrender has died down. Come on," he said abruptly, getting up, "let's go over to the Greasy Spoon."

He thrust his big head down into the deep well of the sink, letting the lukewarm water sluice refreshingly over his broad neck and blue-white sallow night-time face, strong, tough, and humorous. He soaped his hands with thick slathering suds, his muscles twisting slowly like big snakes.

He sang in his powerful quartette baritone:

"Beware! Beware! Beware!
Many brave hearts lie asleep in the deep,
So beware! Bee-*ware!*"

Comfortably they rested in the warm completed exhaustion of the quiet press-room: upstairs the offices, bathed in green-yellow light, sprawled like men relaxed after work. The boys had gone to their routes. The place seemed to breathe slowly and wearily. The dawn-sweet air washed coolly over their faces. The sky was faintly pearled at the horizon.

Strangely, in sharp broken fragments, life awoke in the lilac darkness. Clop-clopping slowly on the ringing street, Number Six, Mrs. Goulderbilt's powerful brown mare, drew inevitably on the bottle-clinking cream-yellow wagon, racked to the top with creamy extra-heavy high-priced milk. The driver was a fresh-skinned young countryman, richly odorous with the smell of fresh sweat and milk. Eight miles, through the starlit dewy fields and forests of Biltburn, under the high brick English lodge-gate, they had come into the town.

At the Pisgah Hotel, opposite the station, the last door clicked softly; the stealthy footfalls of the night ceased; Miss Bernice Redmond gave the negro porter eight one-dollar bills and went definitely to bed with the request that she be not disturbed until one o'clock; a shifting engine slatted noisily about in the yard; past the Biltburn crossing Tom Cline whistled with even, mournful respirations. By this time Number 3 had delivered 142 of his papers: he had only to ascend the rickety wooden stairs of the Eagle Crescent bank to finish the eight houses of the Crescent. He looked anxiously across the hill-and-dale-sprawled negro settlement to the eastern rim: behind Birdseye Gap the sky was pearl-gray—the stars looked drowned. Not much time left, he thought. He had a blond meaty face, pale-colored and covered thickly with young blond hair. His jaw was long and fleshy: it sloped backward. He ran his tongue along his full cracked underlip.

A 1910 model, four-cylinder, seven-passenger Hudson, with mounting steady roar, shot drunkenly out from the station curbing, lurched into the level negro-sleeping stretch of South End Avenue, where the firemen had their tournaments, and zipped townward doing almost fifty. The station quietly stirred in its sleep: there were faint reverberating noises under the empty sheds; brisk hammer-taps upon car wheels, metallic heel clicks in the tiled waiting-room. Sleepily a negress slopped water on the tiles, with languid sullen movement pushing a gray sopping rag around the floor.

It was now five-thirty. Ben had gone out of the house into the orchard at three twenty-five. In another forty minutes Gant would waken, dress, and build the morning fires.

"Ben," said Harry Tugman, as they walked out of the relaxed office, "if Jimmy Dean comes messing around my press-room again they can get some one else to print their lousy sheet. What the hell! I can get a job on the *Atlanta Constitution* whenever I want it."

"Did he come down to-night?" asked Ben.

"Yes," said Harry Tugman, "and he got out again. I told him to take his little tail upstairs."

"Oh, for God's sake!" said Ben. "What did he say?"

"He said, '*I'm* the editor! I'm the editor of this paper!' 'I don't give a good goddam,' I said, 'if you're the President's snotrag. If you want any paper to-day keep out of the press room.' And believe me, he went!"

In cool blue-pearl darkness they rounded the end of the Post Office and cut diagonally across the street to Uneeda Lunch No. 3. It was a small beanery, twelve feet wide, wedged in between an optician's and a Greek shoe parlor.

Within, Dr. Hugh McGuire sat on a stool patiently impaling kidney beans, one at a time, upon the prongs of his fork. A strong odor of corn whisky soaked the air about him. His thick skilful butcher's hands, hairy on the backs, gripped the fork numbly. His heavy-jowled face was blotted by large brown patches. He turned round and stared owlishly as Ben entered, fixing the wavering glare of his bulbous red eyes finally upon him.

"Hello, son," he said in his barking kindly voice, "what can I do for you?"

"Oh, for God's sake," said Ben laughing contemptuously, and jerking his head toward Tugman. "Listen to this, won't you?"

They sat down at the lower end. At this moment, Horse Hines, the undertaker, entered, producing, although he was not a thin man, the effect of a skeleton clad in a black frock coat. His long lantern mouth split horsily in a professional smile displaying big horse teeth in his white heavily starched face.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he said for no apparent reason, rubbing his lean hands briskly as if it was cold. His palm-flesh rattled together like old bones.

Coker, the Lung Shark, who had not ceased to regard McGuire's bean-hunt with sardonic interest, now took the long cigar out of his devil's head and held it between his stained fingers as he tapped his companion.

"Let's get out," he grinned quietly, nodding toward Horse Hines. "It will look bad if we're seen together here."

"Good morning, Ben," said Horse Hines, sitting down below him. "Are all the folks well?" he added softly.

Sideways Ben looked at him scowling, then jerked his head back to the counterman, with a fast bitter flicker of his lips.

"Doctor," said Harry Tugman with servile medicine-man respect, "what do you charge to operate?"

"Operate what?" McGuire barked presently, having pronged a kidney bean.

"Why—appendicitis," said Harry Tugman, for it was all he could think of.

"Three hundred dollars when we go into the belly," said McGuire. He coughed chokingly to the side.

"You're drowning in your own secretions," said Coker with his yellow grin. "Like Old Lady Sladen."

"My God!" said Harry Tugman, thinking jealously of lost news. "When did she go?"

"To-night," said Coker.

"God, I'm sorry to hear that," said Harry Tugman, greatly relieved.

"I've just finished laying the old lady out," said Horse Hines gently. "A bundle of skin and bones." He sighed regretfully, and for a moment his boiled eye moistened.

Ben turned his scowling head around with an expression of nausea.

"Joe," said Horse Hines with merry professionalism, "give me a mug of that embalming fluid." He thrust his horsehead indicatively at the coffee urn.

"Oh, for God's sake," Ben muttered in terms of loathing. "Do you ever wash your damned hands before you come in here?" he burst out irritably.

Ben was twenty. Men did not think of his age.

"Would you like some cold pork, son?" said Coker, with his yellow malicious grin.

Ben made a retching noise in his throat, and put his hand upon his stomach.

"What's the matter, Ben?" Harry Tugman laughed heavily and struck him on the back.

Ben got off the stool, took his coffee mug and the piece of tanned mince pie he had ordered, and moved to the other side of Harry Tugman. Every one laughed. Then he jerked his head toward McGuire with a quick frown.

"By God, Tug," he said. "They've got us cornered."

"Listen to him," said McGuire to Coker. "A chip off the old block, isn't he. I brought that boy into the world, saw him through typhoid, got the old man over seven hundred drunks, and I've been called eighteen different kinds of son of a bitch for my pains even since. But let one of 'em get a belly ache," he added proudly, "and you'll see how quick they come running to me. Isn't that right, Ben?" he said, turning to him.

"Oh, listen to this!" said Ben, laughing irritably and burying his peaked face in his coffee mug. His bitter savor filled the place with life, with tenderness, with beauty. They looked on him with drunken, kindly eyes—at his gray scornful face and the lonely demon flicker of his smile.

"And I tell you something else," said McGuire, ponderously wheeling around on Coker, "if one of them's got to be cut open, see who gets the job. What about it, Ben?" he asked.

"By God, if you ever cut me open, McGuire," said Ben, "I'm going to be damned sure you can walk straight before you do."

"Come on, Hugh," said Coker, prodding McGuire under his shoulder. "Stop chasing those beans around the plate. Crawl off or fall off that damned stool—I don't care which."

McGuire, drunkenly lost in revery, stared witlessly down at his bean plate and sighed.

"Come on, you damned fool," said Coker, getting up, "you've got to operate in forty-five minutes."

"Oh, for God's sake," said Ben, lifting his face from the stained mug, "who's the victim? I'll send flowers."

". . . all of us sooner or later," McGuire mumbled puffily through his puff-lips. "Rich and poor alike. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. Doesn't matter . . . doesn't matter at all."

"In heaven's name," Ben burst out irritably to Coker. "Are you going to let him operate like that? Why don't you shoot them instead?"

Coker plucked the cigar from his long malarial grinning face: "Why, he's just getting hot, son," said he.

Nacreous pearl light swam faintly about the hem of the lilac darkness; the edges of light and darkness were stitched upon the hills. Morning moved like a pearl-gray tide across the fields and up the hillflanks, flowing rapidly down into the soluble dark.

At the curb now, young Dr. Jefferson Spaugh brought his Buick roadster to a halt, and got out, foppishly drawing off his gloves and flicking the silk lapels of his dinner jacket. His face, whisky-red, was highboned and handsome; his mouth was straightlipped, cruel, and sensual. An inherited aura of mountain-cornfield sweat hung scentlessly but telepathically about him; he was a smartened-up mountaineer with country-club and University of Pennsylvania glossings. Four years in Philly change a man.

Thrusting his gloves carelessly into his coat, he entered. McGuire slid bearishly off his stool and gazed him into focus. Then he made beckoning round-arm gestures with his fat hands.

"Look at it, will you," he said. "Does any one know what it is?"

"It's Percy," said Coker. "You know Percy Van der Gould, don't you?"

"I've been dancing all night at the Hilliards," said Spaugh elegantly. "Damn! These new patent-leather pumps have ruined my feet." He sat upon a stool, and elegantly displayed his large country feet, indecently broad and angular in the shoes.

"What's he been doing?" said McGuire doubtfully, turning to Coker for enlightenment.

"He's been dawncing all night at the Hilliards," said Coker in a mincing voice.

McGuire shielded his bloated face coyly with his hand.

"O crush me!" he said, "I'm a grape! Dancing at the Hilliards, were you, you damned Mountain Grill. You've been on a Poon-Tang Picnic in Niggertown. You can't load that bunk on us."

Bull-lunged, their laughter filled the nacreous dawn.

"Patent-leather pumps!" said McGuire. "Hurt his feet. By God, Coker, the first time he came to town ten years ago he'd never been curried above the knees. They had to throw him down to put shoes on him."

Ben laughed thinly to the Angel.

"A couple of slices of buttered toast, if you please, not too brown," said Spaugh delicately to the counterman.

"A mess of hog chitlings and sorghum, you mean, you bastard. You were brought up on salt pork and cornbread."

"We're getting too low and coarse for him, Hugh," said Coker. "Now that he's got drunk with some of the best families, he's in great demand socially. He's so highly thought of that he's become the official midwife to all pregnant virgins."

"Yes," said McGuire, "he's their friend. He helps them out. He not only helps them out, he helps them in again."

"What's wrong with that?" said Spaugh. "We ought to keep it in the family, oughtn't we?"

Their laughter howled out into the tender dawn.

"This conversation is getting too rough for me," said Horse Hines banteringly as he got off his stool.

"Shake hands with Coker before you go, Horse," said McGuire. "He's the best friend you've ever had. You ought to give him royalties."

The light that filled the world now was soft and otherworldly like the light that fills the sea-floors of Catalina where the great fish swim. Flat-footedly, with kidney-aching back, Patrolman Leslie Roberts all unbuttoned slouched through the submarine pearl light and paused, gently agitating his club behind him, as he turned his hollow liverish face toward the open door.

"Here's your patient," said Coker softly, "the Constipated Cop."

Aloud, with great cordiality, they all said: "How are you, Les?"

"Oh, tolable, tolable," said the policeman mournfully. As draggled as his mustaches, he passed on, hocking into the gutter a slimy gob of phlegm.

"Well, good morning, gentlemen," said Horse Hines, making to go.

"Remember what I told you, Horse. Be good to Coker, your best friend." McGuire jerked a thumb toward Coker.

Beneath his thin joviality Horse Hines was hurt.

"I do remember," said the undertaker gravely. "We are both members of honorable professions: in the hour of death when the storm-tossed ship puts into its haven of rest, we are the trustees of the Almighty."

"Why, Horse!" Coker exclaimed, "this is eloquence!"

"The sacred rites of closing the eyes, of composing the limbs, and of preparing for burial the lifeless repository of the departed soul is our holy mission; it is for us, the living, to pour balm upon the broken heart of Grief, to soothe the widow's ache, to brush away the orphan's tears; it is for us, the living, to highly resolve that——"

"—Government of the people, for the people, and by the people," said Hugh McGuire.

"Yes, Horse," said Coker, "you are right. I'm touched. And what's more, we do it all for nothing. At least," he added virtuously, "I never charge for soothing the widow's ache."

"What about embalming the broken heart of Grief?" asked McGuire.

"I said *balm,*" Horse Hines remarked coldly.

"Say, Horse," said Harry Tugman, who had listened with great interest, "didn't you make a speech with all that in it last summer at the Undertakers' Convention?"

"What's true then is true now," said Horse Hines bitterly, as he left the place.

"Jesus!" said Harry Tugman, "we've got him good and sore.

I thought I'd bust a gut, doc, when you pulled that one about embalming the broken heart of Grief."

At this moment Dr. Ravenel brought his Hudson to a halt across the street before the Post Office, and walked over rapidly, drawing his gauntlets off. He was bareheaded; his silver aristocratic hair was thinly rumpled; his surgical gray eyes probed restlessly below the thick lenses of his spectacles. He had a famous, calm, deeply concerned face, shaven, ashen, lean, lit gravely now and then by humor.

"Oh Christ!" said Coker. "Here comes Teacher!"

"Good morning, Hugh," he said as he entered. "Are you going into training again for the bughouse?"

"Look who's here!" McGuire roared hospitably. "Dead-eye Dick, the literary sawbones, whose private collection of gallstones is the finest in the world. When d'jew get back, son?"

"Just in time, it seems," said Ravenel, holding a cigarette cleanly between his long surgical fingers. He looked at his watch. "I believe you have a little engagement at the Ravenel hospital in about half an hour. Is that right?"

"By God, Dick, you're always right," McGuire yelled enthusiastically. "What'd you tell 'em up there, boy?"

"I told them," said Dick Ravenel, whose affection was like a flower that grew behind a wall, "that the best surgeon in America when he was sober was a lousy bum named Hugh McGuire who was always drunk."

"Now wait, wait. Hold on a minute!" said McGuire, holding up his thick hand. "I protest, Dick. You meant well, son, but you got that mixed up. You mean the best surgeon in America when he's not sober."

"Did you read one of your papers?" said Coker.

"Yes," said Dick Ravenel. "I read one on carcinoma of the liver."

"How about one on pyorrhea of the toe-nails?" said McGuire. "Did you read that one?"

Harry Tugman laughed heavily, not wholly knowing why. McGuire belched into the silence loudly and was witlessly adrift for a moment.

"Literature, literature, Dick," he returned portentously. "It's been the ruin of many a good surgeon. You read too much, Dick. Yon Cassius hath a lean and hungry look. You know too much. The letter killeth the spirit, you know. Me—Dick, did you ever know me to take anything out that I didn't put back? Anyway, don't I always leave 'em something to go on with? I'm no scholar, Dick. I've never had your advantages. I'm a self-made butcher. I'm a carpenter, Dick. I'm an interior decorator. I'm a mechanic, a plumber, an electrician, a butcher, a tailor, a jeweller. I'm a jewel, a gem, a diamond in the rough, Dick. I'm a practical man. I take out their works, spit upon them, trim off the dirty edges, and send them on their way again. I economize, Dick. I throw away everything I can't use, and use everything I throw away. Who made the Pope a tailbone from his knuckle? Who made the dog howl? Aha—that's why the governor looks so young. We are filled up with useless machinery, Dick. Efficiency, economy, power! Have you a Little Fairy in your Home? You haven't! Then let the Gold Dust Twins do the work! Ask Ben—he knows!"

"O my God!" laughed Ben thinly, "listen to that, won't you?"

Two doors below, directly before the Post Office, Pete Mascari rolled upward with corrugated thunder the shutters of his fruit shop. The pearl light fell coolly upon the fruity architecture, on the pyramided masonry of spit-bright winesaps, the thin sharp yellow of the Florida oranges, the purple Tokays, sawdust-bedded. There was a stale fruity odor from the shop of ripening bananas, crated apples, and the acrid tang of powder; the windows were filled with Roman candles, crossed rockets, pinwheels, squat green Happy Hooligans, and mutilating Jack Johnsons, red cannoncrackers, and tiny acrid packets of crackling spattering firecrackers. Light fell a moment on the ashen corpsiness of his face and on the liquid Sicilian poison of his eyes.

"Don' pincha da grape. Pinch da banan'!"

A street-car, toy-green with new Spring paint, went squareward.

"Dick," said McGuire more soberly, "take the job, if you like."

Ravenel shook his head.

"I'll stand by," said he. "I won't operate. I'm afraid of one like this. It's your job, drunk or sober."

"Removing a tumor from a woman, ain't you?" said Coker.

"No," said Dick Ravenel, "removing a woman from a tumor."

"Bet you it weighs fifty pounds, if it weighs an ounce," said McGuire with sudden professional interest.

Dick Ravenel winced ever so slightly. A cool spurt of young wind, clean as a kid, flowed by him. McGuire's meaty shoulders recoiled burlily as if from the cold shock of water. He seemed to waken.

"I'd like a bath," he said to Dick Ravenel, "and a shave." He rubbed his hand across his blotched hairy face.

"You can use my room, Hugh, at the hotel," said Jeff Spaugh, looking at Ravenel somewhat eagerly.

"I'll use the hospital," he said.

"You'll just have time," said Ravenel.

"In God's name, let's get a start on," he cried impatiently.

"Did you see Kelly do this one at Hopkins?" asked McGuire.

"Yes," said Dick Ravenel, "after a very long prayer. That's to give power to his elbow. The patient died."

"Damn the prayers!" said McGuire. "They won't do much good to this one. She called me a low-down lickered-up whisky-drinking bastard last night: if she still feels like that she'll get well."

"These mountain women take a lot of killing," said Jeff Spaugh sagely.

"Do you want to come along?" McGuire asked Coker.

"No, thanks. I'm getting some sleep," he answered. "The old girl took a hell of a time. I thought she'd never get through dying."

They started to go.

"Ben," said McGuire, with a return to his former manner, "tell the Old Man I'll beat hell out of him if he doesn't give Helen a rest. Is he staying sober?"

"In heaven's name, McGuire, how should I know?" Ben burst out irritably. "Do you think that's all I've got to do—watching your licker-heads?"

"That's a great girl, boy," said McGuire sentimentally. "One in a million."

"Hugh, for God's sake, come on," cried Dick Ravenel.

The four medical men went out into the pearl light. The town emerged from the lilac darkness with a washed renascent cleanliness. All the world seemed as young as Spring. McGuire walked across to Ravenel's car, and sank comfortably with a sense of invigoration into the cool leathers. Jeff Spaugh plunged off violently with a ripping explosion of his engine and a cavalier wave of his hand.

Admiringly Harry Tugman's face turned to the slumped burly figure of Hugh McGuire.

"By God!" he boasted, "I bet he does the damnedest piece of operating you ever heard of."

"Why, hell," said the counterman loyally, "he ain't worth a damn until he's got a quart of corn licker under his belt. Give him a few drinks and he'll cut off your damned head and put it on again without your knowing it."

As Jeff Spaugh roared off Harry Tugman said jealously: "Look at that bastard. Mr. Vanderbilt. He thinks he's hell, don't he? A big pile of bull. Ben, do you reckon he was really out at the Hilliards to-night?"

"Oh for God's sake," said Ben irritably, "how the hell should I know! What difference does it make?" he added furiously.

"I guess Little Maudie will fill up the column to-morrow with some of her crap," said Harry Tugman. " 'The Younger Set,' she calls it! Christ! It goes all the way from every little bitch old enough to wear drawers, to Old Man Redmond. If Saul Gudger belongs to the Younger Set, Ben, you and I are still in the third grade. Why, hell, yes," he said with an air of conviction to the grinning counterman, "he was bald as a pig's knuckle when the Spanish American War broke out."

The counterman laughed.

Foaming with brilliant slapdash improvisation Harry Tugman declaimed:

"Members of the Younger Set were charmingly entertained last night at a dinner dance given at Snotwood, the beautiful residence of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Firkins, in honor of their youngest daughter, Gladys, who made her debutt this season. Mr. and Mrs. Firkins, accompanied by their daughter, greeted each of the arriving guests at the threshhold in a manner reviving the finest old traditions of Southern aristocracy, while Mrs. Firkins' accomplished sister, Miss Catherine Hipkiss, affectionately known to members of the local younger set as Roaring Kate, supervised the checking of overcoats, evening wraps, jock-straps, and jewelry.

"Dinner was served promptly at eight o'clock, followed by coffee and Pluto Water at eighty forty-five. A delicious nine-course collation had been prepared by Artaxerxes Papadopolos, the well-known confectioner and caterer, and proprietor of the Bijou Café for Ladies and Gents.

"After first-aid and a thorough medical examination by Dr. Jefferson Reginald Alfonso Spaugh, the popular *gin*-ecologist, the guests adjourned to the Ball Room where dance music was provided by Zeke Buckner's Upper Hominy Stringed Quartette, Mr. Buckner himself officiating at the trap drum and tambourine.

"Among those dancing were the Misses Aline Titsworth, Lena Ginster, Ophelia Legg, Gladys Firkins, Beatrice Slutsky, Mary Whitesides, Helen Shockett, and Lofta Barnes.

"Also the Messrs. I. C. Bottom, U. B. Freely, R. U. Reddy, O. I. Lovett, Cummings Strong, Samson Horney, Preston Updyke, Dows Wicket, Pettigrew Biggs, Otis Goode, and J. Broad Stern."

Ben laughed noiselessly, and bent his pointed face into the mug again. Then, he stretched his thin arms out, extending his body sensually upward, and forcing out in a wide yawn the night-time accumulation of weariness, boredom, and disgust.

"Oh-h-h-h my God!"

Virginal sunlight crept into the street in young moteless shafts. At this moment Gant awoke.

He lay quietly on his back for a moment in the pleasant yellow-shaded dusk of the sitting-room, listening to the rippling flutiness of the live piping birdy morning. He yawned cavernously and thrust his right hand scratching into the dense hair-thicket of his breast.

The fast cackle-cluck of sensual hens. Come and rob us. All through the night for you, master. Rich protesting yielding voices of Jewesses. Do it, don't it. Break an egg in them.

Sleepless, straight, alert, the counterpane moulded over his gaunt legs, he listened to the protesting invitations of the hens.

From the warm dust, shaking their fat feathered bodies, protesting but satisfied they staggered up. For me. The earth too and the vine. The moist new earth cleaving like cut pork from the plough. Or like water from a ship. The spongy sod spaded cleanly and rolled back like flesh. Or the earth loosened and hoed gently around the roots of the cherry trees. The earth receives my seed. For me the great lettuces. Spongy and full of sap now like a woman. The thick grapevine—in August the heavy clustered grapes— How there? Like milk from a breast. Or blood through a vein. Fattens and plumps them.

All through the night the blossoms dropping. Soon now the White Wax. Green apples end of May. Isaacs' June Apple hangs half on my side. Bacon and fried green apples.

With sharp whetted hunger he thought of breakfast. He threw the sheet back cleanly, swung in an orbit to a sitting position and put his white somewhat phthisic feet on the floor. Standing up tenderly, he walked over to his leather rocker and put on a pair of clean white-footed socks. Then he pulled his nightgown over his head, looking for a moment in the dresser mirror at his great boned structure, the long stringy muscles of his arms, and his flat-meated hairy chest. His stomach sagged paunchily. He thrust his white flaccid calves quickly through the shrunken legs of a union suit, stretched it out elasticly with a comfortable widening of his shoulders and buttoned it. Then he stepped into his roomy sculpturally heavy trousers and drew on his soft-leathered laceless shoes. Crossing his suspender braces over his shoulders, he strode into the kitchen and had a brisk fire of oil and pine snapping in the range within three minutes. He was stimulated and alive in all the fresh wakefulness of the Spring morning.

Through Birdseye Gap, in the dewy richness of Lunn's Cove, Judge Webster Tayloe, the eminent, prosperous, and aristocratic corporation counsel (retired, but occasional consultations), rose in the rich walnut twilight of his bedchamber, noted approvingly, through the black lenses of the glasses that gave his long, subtle, and contemptuous face its final advantage over the rabble, that one of his country bumpkins was coming from the third pasture with a slopping pail of new milk, another was sharpening a scythe in the young glint of the sun, and another, emulating his more intelligent fellow, the horse, was backing a buggy slowly under the carriage shed.

Approvingly he watched his young mulatto son come over the lawn with lazy cat-speed, noting with satisfaction the grace and quickness of his movements, the slender barrel strength of his torso, his smallboned resiliency. Also the well-shaped intelligent head, the eager black eyes, the sensitive oval face, and the beautiful coprous olive of the skin. He was very like a better-class Spaniard. Quod potui perfeci. By this fusion, perhaps, men like men.

By the river the reed-pipes, the muse's temple, the sacred wood again. Why not? As in this cove. I, too, have lived in Arcady.

He took off his glasses for a moment and looked at the ptotic malevolence of his left eye, and the large harlequinesque wart in the cheek below it. The black glasses gave the suggestion that he was half-masked; they added a touch of unsearchable mystery to the subtle, sensual and disquieting intelligence of his face. His negro man appeared at this moment and told him his bath was ready. He drew the long thin nightgown over his freckled Fitzsimmons body and stepped vigorously into tepid water. Then for ten minutes he was sponged, scraped, and kneaded, upon a long table by the powerful plastic hands of the negro. He dressed in fresh laundered underwear and newly pressed clothes of black. He tied a black string carelessly below the wide belt of starched collar and buttoned across his straight long figure a frock coat that reached his knees. He took a cigarette from a box on his table and lighted it.

Bouncing tinnily down the coiling road that came through the Gap from the town, a flivver glinted momently through the trees. Two men were in it. His face hardened against it, he watched it go by his gates on the road with a scuffle of dust.

Dimly he saw their lewd red mountain faces, and completed the image with sweat and corduroy. And in the town their city cousins. Brick, stucco, the white little eczema of Suburbia. Federated Half-Breeds of the World.

Into my valley next with lawnmowers and front lawns. He ground out the life of the cigarette against an ashtray, and began a rapid window calculation of his horses, asses, kine, swine, and hens; the stored plenitude of his great barn, the heavy fruitage of his fields and orchards. A man came toward the house with a bucket of eggs in one hand and a bucket of butter in the other; each cake was stamped with a sheaf of wheat and wrapped loosely in clean white linen cloths. He smiled grimly: if attacked he could withstand a prolonged siege.

At Dixieland, Eliza slept soundly in a small dark room with a window opening on the uncertain light of the back porch. Her chamber was festooned with a pendant wilderness of cord and string; stacks of old newspapers and magazines were piled in the corners; and every shelf was loaded with gummed, labelled, half-filled medicine bottles. There was a smell in the air of mentholatum, Vick's Pneumonia Cure, and sweet glycerine. The negress arrived, coming under the built-up house and climbing lazily the steep tunnel of back steps. She knocked at the door.

"Who's there!" cried Eliza sharply, waking at once, and coming forward to the door. She wore a gray flannel nightgown over a heavy woollen undershirt that Ben had discarded: the pendant string floated gently to and fro as she opened the door, like some strange seamoss floating below the sea. Upstairs, in the small front room with the sleeping-porch, slept Miss Billie Edwards, twenty-four, of Missouri, the daring and masterful lion-tamer of Johnny L. Jones Combined Shows, then playing in the field on the hill behind the Plum Street School. Next to her, in the large airy room at the corner, Mrs. Marie Pert, forty-one, the wife of an itinerant and usually absent drug salesman, lay deep in the pit of alcoholic slumber. Upon each end of the mantel was a small snapshot in a silver frame—one of her absent daughter, Louise, eighteen, and one of Benjamin Gant, lying on the grass-bank in front of the house, propped on his elbow and wearing a wide straw hat that shaded all his face except his mouth. Also, in other chambers, front and back, Mr. Conway Richards, candy-wheel concessionaire with the Johnny L. Jones Combined Shows, Miss Lily Mangum, twenty-six, trained nurse, Mr. William H. Baskett, fifty-three, of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, cotton grower, banker, and sufferer from malaria, and his wife; in the large room at the head of the stairs Miss Annie Mitchel, nineteen, of Valdosta, Georgia, Miss Thelma Cheshire, twenty-one, of Florence, South Carolina, and Mrs. Rose Levin, twenty-eight, of Chicago, Illinois, all members of the chorus of "Molasses" Evans and His Broadway Beauties, booked out of Atlanta, Georgia, by the Piedmont Amusement Agency.

"O G-hirls! The Duke of Gorgonzola and the Count of Limburger are on their way here now. I want all you girls to be nice to them and to show them a good time when they arrive."

"You *bet* we will."

"And keep your eye on the little one—he's the one with all the money."

"I'll *say* we will. Hurrah, Hurrah, Hurrah!"

"We are the girls that have the fun,
We're snappy and happy every one;
We're jolly and gay
And ready to play,
And that is why we say-ee——"

Behind a bill-plastered fence-boarding on upper Valley Street, opposite the Y. M. I. (colored), and in the very heart of the crowded amusement and commercial centre of Altamont's colored population, Moses Andrews, twenty-six, colored, slept the last great sleep of white and black. His pockets, which only the night before had been full of the money Saul Stein, the pawnbroker, had given him in exchange for certain articles which he had taken from the home of Mr. George Rollins, the attorney (as an 18-carat Waltham gold watch with a heavy chain of twined gold, the diamond engagement ring of Mrs. Rollins, three pairs of the finest ilk stockings, and two pairs of gentlemen's underdrawers), were now empty, a half-filled bottle of Cloverleaf Bonded Kentucky Rye, with which he had retired behind the boards to slumber, lay unmolested in the flaccid grip of his left hand, and his broad black throat gaped cleanly open from ear to ear, as a result of the skilled razor-work of his hated and hating rival, Jefferson Flack, twenty-eight, who now lay peacefully, unsuspected and unsought, with their mutual mistress, Miss Molly Fiske, in her apartment on east Pine Street. Moses had been murdered in moonlight.

A starved cat walked softly along by the boards on Upper Valley: as the courthouse bell boomed out its solid six strokes, eight negro laborers, the bottoms of their overalls stiff with agglutinated cement, tramped by like a single animal, in a wedge, each carrying his lunch in a small lard bucket.

Meanwhile, the following events occurred simultaneously throughout the neighborhood:

Dr. H. M. McRae, fifty-eight, minister of the First Presbyterian Church, having washed his lean Scotch body, arrayed himself in stiff black and a boiled white shirt, and shaved his spare clean un-aging face, descended from his chamber in his residence on Cumberland Avenue, to his breakfast of oatmeal, dry toast, and boiled milk. His heart was pure, his mind upright, his faith and his life like a clean board scrubbed with sandstone. He prayed in thirty-minute prayers without impertinence for all men and the success of all good ventures. He was a white unwasting flame that shone through love and death; his speech rang out like steel with a steady passion.

In Dr. Frank Engel's Sanitarium and Turkish Bath Establishment on Liberty Street, Mr. J. H. Brown, wealthy sportsman and publisher of the *Altamont Citizen,* sank into dreamless sleep, after five minutes in the steam-closet, ten in the tub, and thirty in the drying-room, where he had submitted to the expert osteopathy of "Colonel" Andrews (as Dr. Engel's skilled negro masseur was affectionately known), from the soles of his gouty feet to the veinous silken gloss of his slightly purple face.

Across the street, at the corner of Liberty and Federal, and at the foot of Battery Hill, a white-jacketed negro sleepily restacked in boxes the scattered poker-chips that covered the centre table in the upstairs centre room of the Altamont City Club.

The guests, just departed, were Mr. Gilbert Woodcock, Mr. Reeves Stikeleather, Mr. Henry Pentland, Jr., Mr. Sidney Newbeck, of Cleveland, Ohio (retired). and the aforementioned Mr. J. H. Brown.

"And, Jesus, Ben!" said Harry Tugman, emerging at this moment from Uneeda No. 3, "I thought I'd have a hemorrhage when they pulled the Old Man out of the closet. After all the stuff he printed about cleaning up the town, too."

"It wouldn't surprise me if Judge Sevier had them raid him," said Ben.

"Why certainly, Ben," said Harry Tugman impatiently, "that's the idea, but Queen Elizabeth was behind it. You don't think there's anything she doesn't hear about, do you? So help me Jesus, you never heard a yap out of him for a week. He was afraid to show his face out of the office."

At the Convent School of Saint Catherine's on Saint Clement's Road, Sister Theresa, the Mother Superior, walked softly through the dormitory lifting the window-shade beside each cot, letting the orchard cherry-apple bloom come gently into the long cool glade of roseleaf sleeping girls. Their breath expired gently upon their dewy half-opened mouths, light fell rosily upon the pillowed curve of their arms, their slender young sides, and the crisp pink buds of their breasts. At the other end of the room a fat girl lay squarely on her back, her arms and legs outspread, and snored solidly through blubbering lips. They had yet an hour of sleep.

From one of the little white tables between the cots Theresa picked up an opened book incautiously left there the night before, read below her gray mustache with the still inward smile of her great-boned face, its title—*The Common Law,* by Robert W. Chambers—and gripping a pencil in her broad earthstained hand, scrawled briefly in jagged male letters: "Rubbish, Elizabeth—but see for yourself." Then, on her soft powerful tread, she went downstairs, and entered her study, where Sister Louise (French), Sister Mary (History), and Sister Bernice (Ancient Languages) were waiting for the morning consultation. When they had gone, she sat down to her desk and worked for an hour on the manuscript of that book, modestly intended for school children, which has since celebrated her name wherever the noble architecture of prose is valued—the great *Biology*.

Then the gong rang in the dormitory, she heard the high laughter of young maidens, and rising saw, coming from the plum-tree by the wall, a young nun, Sister Agnes, with blossoms in her arms.

Below, tree-hidden, in the Biltburn bottom, there was a thunder on the rails, a wailing whistle cry.

Beneath the City Hall, in the huge sloping cellar, the market booths were open. The aproned butchers swung their cleavers down on fresh cold joints, slapping the thick chops on heavy sheets of mottled paper, and tossing them, roughly tied, to the waiting negro delivery-boys.

The self-respecting negro, J. H. Jackson, stood in his square vegetable-stall, attended by his two grave-faced sons, and his spectacled businesslike daughter. He was surrounded by wide slanting shelves of fruit and vegetables, smelling of the earth and morning—great crinkled lettuces, fat radishes still clotted damply with black loam, quill-stemmed young onions newly wrenched from gardens, late celery, spring potatoes, and the thin rinded citrous fruits of Florida.

Above him, Sorrell, the fish and oyster man, drew up from the depths of an enamelled ice-packed can dripping ladlefuls of oysters, pouring them into thick cardboard cartons. Wide-bellied heavy sea-fish—carp, trout, bass, shad—lay gutted in beds of ice.

Mr. Michael Walter Creech, the butcher having finished his hearty breakfast of calves' liver, eggs and bacon, hot biscuits and coffee, made a sign to one of the waiting row of negro boys. The line sprang forward like hounds; he stopped them with a curse and a lifted cleaver. The fortunate youth who had been chosen then came forward and took the tray, still richly morselled with food and a pot half full of coffee. As he had to depart at this moment on a delivery, he put it down in the sawdust at the end of the bench and spat copiously upon it in order to protect it from his scavenging comrades. Then he wheeled off, full of rich laughter and triumphant malice. Mr. Creech looked at his niggers darkly.

The town had so far forgotten Mr. Creech's own African blood (an eighth on his father's side, old Walter Creech, out of Yellow Jenny) that it was about ready to offer him political preferment; but Mr. Creech himself had not forgotten. He glanced bitterly at his brother, Jay, who, happily ignorant of hatred, that fanged poison which may taint even a brother's heart, was enthusiastically cleaving spare-ribs on the huge bole of his own table, singing meanwhile in a rich tenor voice the opening bars of "The Little Gray Home In The West:"

". . . there are blue eyes that shine
Just because they meet mine . . ."

Mr. Creech looked venomously at Jay's yellow jowls, the fat throbbing of his jaundiced throat, the crisp singed whorl of his hair.

By God, he thought in his anguish of spirit, he might be taken for a Mexican.

Jay's golden voice neared its triumph, breaking with delicate restraint, on the last note, into a high sweet falsetto which he maintained for more than twenty seconds. All of the butchers stopped working, several of them, big strong men with grown-up families dashed a tear out of their eyes.

The great audience was held spellbound. Not a soul stirred. Not even a dog or a horse stirred. As the last sweet note melted away in a gossamer tremolo, a silence profound as that of the tombs, nay, of death itself, betokened the highest triumph the artist is destined to know upon this earth. Somewhere in the crowd a woman sobbed and collapsed in a faint. She was immediately carried out by two Boy Scouts who happened to be present, and who administered first aid to her in the rest-room, one of them hastily kindling a crackling fire of pine boughs by striking two flints together, while the other made a tourniquet, and tied several knots in his handkerchief. Then pandemonium broke loose. Women tore the jewels from their fingers, ropes of pearls from their necks, chrysanthemums, hyacinths, tulips and daisies from their expensive corsages, while the fashionably-dressed men in the near-by stalls kept up a constant bombardment of tomatoes, lettuces, new potatoes, beef-tallow, pigs' knockles, fish-heads, clams, loin-chops, and pork-sausages.

Among the stalls of the market, the boarding-house keepers of Altamont walked with spying bargain-hunting eyes and inquisitive nose. They were of various sizes and ages, but they were all stamped with the print of haggling determination and a pugnacious closure of the mouth. They pried in among the fish and vegetables, pinching cabbages, weighing onions, exfoliating lettuce-heads. You've got to keep your eye on people or they'll skin you. And if you leave things to a lazy shiftless nigger she'll waste more than she cooks. They looked at one another hard-faced—Mrs. Barrett of the Grosvenor at Mrs. Neville of Glen View; Mrs. Ambler of the Colonial at Miss Mamie Featherstone of Ravencrest; Mrs. Ledbetter of the Belvedere——

"I hear you're full up, Mrs. Coleman," said she inquiringly.

"O, I'm full up all the time," said Mrs. Coleman. "My people are all permanents, I don't want to fool with the transients," she said loftily.

"Well," said Mrs. Ledbetter acidly, "I could fill my house up at any time with lungers who call themselves something else, but I won't have them. I was saying the other day——"

Mrs. Michalove of Oakwood at Mrs. Jarvis of The Waverley; Mrs. Cowan of Ridgmont at——

The city is splendidly equipped to meet the demands of the great and steadily growing crowd of tourists that fill the Mountain Metropolis during the busy months of June, July, and August. In addition to eight hotels de luxe of the highest quality, there were registered at the Board of Trade in 1911 over 250 private hotels, boarding-houses and sanitariums all catering to the needs of those who come on missions of business, pleasure, or health.

Stop their baggage at the station.

At this moment Number 3, having finished his route, stepped softly on to the slime-scummed porch of the house on Valley Street, rapped gently at the door, and opened it quietly, groping his way through black miasmic air to the bed in which May Corpening lay. She muttered as if drugged as he touched her, turned toward him, and sleepily awakened, drew him down to her with heavied and sensual caress, yoked under her big coppery arms. Tom Cline clumped greasily up the steps of his residence on Bartlett Street, swinging his tin pail; Ben returned to the paper office with Harry Tugman; and Eugene, in the back room on Woodson Street, waking suddenly to Gant's powerful command from the foot of the stairs, turned his face full into a momentary vision of roseflushed blue sky and tender blossoms that drifted slowly earthward.

XV

THE mountains were his masters. They rimmed in life. They were the cup of reality, beyond growth, beyond struggle and death. They were his absolute unity in the midst of eternal change. Old haunt-eyed faces glimmered in his memory. He thought of Swain's cow, St. Louis, death, himself in the cradle. He was the haunter of himself, trying for a moment to recover what he had been part of. He did not understand change, he did not understand growth. He stared at his framed baby picture in the parlor, and turned away sick with fear and the effort to touch, retain, grasp himself for only a moment.

And these bodiless phantoms of his life appeared with terrible precision, with all the mad nearness of a vision. That which was five years gone came within the touch of his hand, and he ceased at that moment to believe in his own existence. He expected some one to wake him; he would hear Gant's great voice below the laden vines, would gaze sleepily from the porch into the rich low moon, and go obediently to bed. But still there would be all that he remembered before that and what if— Cause flowed ceaselessly into cause.

He heard the ghostly ticking of his life; his powerful clai voyance, the wild Scotch gift of Eliza, burned inward back across the phantom years, plucking out of the ghostly shadows a million gleams of light—a little station by the rails at dawn, the road cleft through the pineland seen at twilight, a smoky cabin-light below the trestles, a boy who ran among the bounding calves, a wisp-haired slattern, with snuff-sticked mouth, framed in a door, floury negroes unloading sacks from freight-cars on a shed, the man who drove the Fair Grounds bus at Saint Louis, a cool-lipped lake at dawn.

His life coiled back into the brown murk of the past like a twined filament of electric wire; he gave life, a pattern, and movement to these million sensations that Chance, the loss or gain of a moment, the turn of the head, the enormous and aimless impulsion of accident, had thrust into the blazing heat of him. His mind picked out in white living brightness these pinpoints of experience and the ghostliness of all things else became more awful because of them. So many of the sensations that returned to open haunting vistas of fantasy and imagining had been caught from a whirling landscape through the windows of the train.

And it was this that awed him—the weird combination of fixity and change, the terrible moment of immobility stamped with eternity in which, passing life at great speed, both the observer and the observed seem frozen in time. There was one moment of timeless suspension when the land did not move, the train did not move, the slattern in the doorway did not move, he did not move. It was as if God had lifted his baton sharply above the endless orchestration of the seas, and the eternal movement had stopped, suspended in the timeless architecture of the absolute. Or like those motion-pictures that describe the movements of a swimmer making a dive, or a horse taking a hedge—movement is petrified suddenly in mid-air, the inexorable completion of an act is arrested. Then, completing its parabola, the suspended body plops down into the pool. Only, these images that burnt in him existed without beginning or ending, without the essential structure of time. Fixed in no-time, the slattern vanished, fixed, without a moment of transition.

His sense of unreality came from time and movement, from imagining the woman, when the train had passed, as walking back into the house, lifting a kettle from the hearth embers. Thus life turned shadow, the living lights went ghost again. The boy among the calves. Where later? Where now?

I am, he thought, a part of all that I have touched and that has touched me, which, having for me no existence save that which I gave to it, became other than itself by being mixed with what I then was, and is now still otherwise, having fused with what I now am, which is itself a cumulation of what I have been becoming. Why here? Why there? Why now? Why then?

The fusion of the two strong egotisms, Eliza's inbrooding and Gant's expanding outward, made of him a fanatical zealot in the religion of Chance. Beyond all misuse, waste, pain, tragedy, death, confusion, unswerving necessity was on the rails; not a sparrow fell through the air but that its repercussion acted on his life, and the lonely light that fell upon the viscous and interminable seas at dawn awoke sea-changes washing life to him. The fish swam upward from the depth.

The seed of our destruction will blossom in the desert, the alexin of our cure grows by a mountain rock, and our lives are haunted by a Georgia slattern because a London cut-purse went unhung. Through Chance, we are each a ghost to all the others, and our only reality; through Chance, the huge hinge of the world, and a grain of dust; the stone that starts an avalanche, the pebble whose concentric circles widen across the seas.

He believed himself thus at the centre of life; he believed the mountains rimmed the heart of the world; he believed that from all the chaos of accident the inevitable event came at the inexorable moment to add to the sum of his life.

Against the hidden other flanks of the immutable hills the world washed like a vast and shadowy sea, alive with the great fish of his imagining. Variety, in this unvisited world, was unending, but order and purpose certain: there would be no wastage in adventure—courage would be rewarded with beauty, talent with success, all merit with its true deserving. There would be peril, there would be toil, there would be struggle. But there would not be confusion and waste. There would not be groping. For collected Fate would fall, on its chosen moment, like a plum. There was no disorder in enchantment.

Spring lay abroad through all the garden of this world. Beyond the hills the land bayed out to other hills, to golden cities, to rich meadows, to deep forests, to the sea. Forever and forever.

Beyond the hills were the mines of King Solomon, the toy republics of Central America, and little tinkling fountains in a court; beyond, the moonlit roofs of Bagdad, the little grated blinds of Samarkand, the moonlit camels of Bythinia, the Spanish ranch-house of the Triple Z, and J. B. Montgomery and his lovely daughter stepping from their private car upon a western track; and the castle-haunted crags of Graustark; the fortune-yielding casino of Monte Carlo; and the blue eternal Mediterranean, mother of empires. And instant wealth ticked out upon a tape, and the first stage of the Eiffel Tower where the restaurant was, and Frenchmen setting fire to their whiskers, and a farm in Devon, white cream, brown ale, the winter's chimney merriment, and *Lorna Doone;* and the hanging gardens of Babylon, and supper in the sunset with the queens, and the slow slide of the barge upon the Nile, or the wise rich bodies of Egyptian women couched on moonlit balustrades, and the thunder of the chariots of great kings, and tomb-treasure sought at midnight, and the wine-rich chateau land of France, and calico warm legs in hay.

Upon a field in Thrace Queen Helen lay, her lovely body dappled in the sun.

Meanwhile, business had been fairly good. Eliza's earning-power the first few years at Dixieland had been injured by her illnesses. Now, however, she had recovered, and had paid off the last instalment on the house. It was entirely hers. The property at this time was worth perhaps $12,000. In addition she had borrowed $3,500 on a twenty-year $5,000 life insurance policy that had only two years more to run, and had made extensive alterations: she had added a large sleeping-porch upstairs, tacked on two rooms, a bath, and a hallway on one side, and extended a hallway, adding three bedrooms, two baths, and a watercloset, on the other. Downstairs she had widened the veranda, put in a large sun-parlor under the sleeping-porch, knocked out the archway in the dining-room, which she prepared to use as a big bedroom in the slack season, scooped out a small pantry in which the family was to eat, and added a tiny room beside the kitchen for her own occupancy.

The construction was after her own plans, and of the cheapest material: it never lost the smell of raw wood, cheap varnish, and flimsy rough plastering, but she had added eight or ten rooms at a cost of only $3,000. The year before she had banked almost $2,000—her bank account was almost $5,000. In addition, she owned jointly with Gant the shop on the Square, which had thirty feet of frontage, and was valued at $20,000, from which he got $65 a month in rent: $20 from Jannadeau, $25 from the McLean Plumbing Company in the basement, and $20 from the J. N. Gillespie Printing Co., which occupied all of the second story.

There were, besides, three good building-lots on Merrion Avenue valued at $2,000 apiece, or at $5,500 for all three; the house on Woodson Street valued at $5,000; 110 acres of wooded mountainside with a farmhouse, several hundred peach, apple and cherry trees, and a few acres of arable ground for which Gant received $120 a year in rent, and which they valued at $50 an acre, $5,500; two houses, one on Carter Street, and one on Duncan, rented to railway people, for which they received $25 a month apiece, and which they valued together at $4,500; forty-eight acres of land two miles above Biltburn, and four from Altamont, upon the important Reynoldsville Road, which they valued at $210 an acre, or $10,000; three houses in Niggertown—one on lower Valley Street, one on Beaumont Crescent, just below the negro Johnson's big house, and one on Short Oak, valued at $600, $900, and $1,600 respectively, and drawing a room rental of $8, $12, and $17 a month (total: $3,100 and $37 rental); two houses across the river, four miles away in West Altamont, valued at $2,750 and at $3,500, drawing a rental of $22 and $30 a month; three lots, lost in the growth of a rough hillside, a mile from the main highway through West Altamont, $500; and a house, unoccupied, object of Gantian anathema, on Lower Hatton Avenue, $4,500.

In addition, Gant held 10 shares, which were already worth $200 each ($2,000), in the newly organized Fidelity Bank; his stock of stones, monuments, and fly-specked angels represented an investment of $2,700, although he could not have sold them outright for so much; and he had about $3,000 deposited in the Fidelity, the Merchants, and the Battery Hill banks.

Thus, at the beginning of 1912, before the rapid and intensive development of Southern industry, and the consequent tripling of Altamont's population, and before the multiplication of her land values, the wealth of Gant and Eliza amounted to about

$100,000, the great bulk of which was solidly founded in juicy well chosen pieces of property of Eliza's selection, yielding them a monthly rental of more than $200, which, added to their own earning capacities at the shop and Dixieland, gave them a combined yearly income of $8,000 or $10,000. Although Gant often cried out bitterly against his business and declared, when he was not attacking property, that he had never made even a bare living from his tombstones, he was rarely short of ready money: he usually had one or two small commissions from country people, and he always carried a well-filled purse, containing $150 or $200 in five and ten-dollar bills, which he allowed Eugene to count out frequently, enjoying his son's delight, and the feel of abundance.

Eliza had suffered one or two losses in her investments, led astray by a strain of wild romanticism which destroyed for the moment her shrewd caution. She invested $1,200 in the Missouri Utopia of a colonizer, and received nothing for her money but a weekly copy of the man's newspaper, several beautiful prospectuses of the look of things when finished, and a piece of clay sculpture, eight inches in height, showing Big Brother with his little sisters Jenny and Kate, the last with thumb in her mouth.

"By God," said Gant, who made savage fun of the proceeding, "she ought to have it on her nose."

And Ben sneered, jerking his head toward it, saying:

"There's her $1,200."

But Eliza was preparing to go on by herself. She saw that cooperation with Gant in the purchase of land was becoming more difficult each year. And with something like pain, something assuredly like hunger, she saw various rich plums fall into other hands or go unbought. She realized that in a very short time land values would soar beyond her present means. And she proposed to be on hand when the pie was cut.

Across the street from Dixieland was the Brunswick, a well-built red brick house of twenty rooms. The marble facings had been done by Gant himself twenty years before, the hardwood floors and oak timbering by Will Pentland. It was an ugly gabled Victorian house, the marriage gift of a rich Northerner to his daughter, who died of tuberculosis.

"Not a better built house in town," said Gant.

Nevertheless he refused to buy it with Eliza, and with an aching heart she saw it go to S. Greenberg, the rich junk-man, for $8,500. Within a year he had sold off five lots at the back, on the Yancey Street side, for $1,000 each, and was holding the house for $20,000.

"We could have had our money back by now three times over," Eliza fretted.

She did not have enough money at the time for any important investment. She saved and she waited.

Will Pentland's fortune at this time was vaguely estimated at from $500,000 to $700,000. It was mainly in property, a great deal of which was situated—warehouses and buildings—near the passenger depot of the railway.

Sometimes Altamont people, particularly the young men who loafed about Collister's drug-store, and who spent long dreamy hours estimating the wealth of the native plutocracy, called Will Pentland a millionaire. At this time it was a distinction in American life to be a millionaire. There were only six or eight thousand. But Will Pentland wasn't one. He was really worth only a half million.

Mr. Goulderbilt was a millionaire. He was driven into town in a big Packard, but he got out and went along the streets like other men.

One time Gant pointed him out to Eugene. He was about to enter a bank.

"There he is," whispered Gant. "Do you see him?"

Eugene nodded, wagging his head mechanically. He was unable to speak. Mr. Goulderbilt was a small dapper man, with black hair, black clothes, and a black mustache. His hands and feet were small.

"He's got over $50,000,000," said Gant. "You'd never think it to look at him, would you?"

And Eugene dreamed of these money princes living in a princely fashion. He wanted to see them riding down a street in a crested coach around which rode a teetering guard of liveried outriders. He wanted their fingers to be heavily gemmed, their clothes trimmed with ermine, their women coroneted with flashing mosaics of amethyst, beryl, ruby, topaz, sapphire, opal, emerald, and wearing thick ropes of pearls. And he wanted to see them living in palaces of alabaster columns, eating in vast halls upon an immense creamy table from vessels of old silver—eating strange fabulous foods—swelling unctuous paps of a fat pregnant sow, oiled mushrooms, calvered salmon, jugged hare, the beards of barbels dressed with an exquisite and poignant sauce, carps' tongues, dormice and camels' heels, with spoons of amber headed with diamond and carbuncle, and cups of agate, studded with emeralds, hyacinths, and rubies—everything, in fact, for which Epicure Mammon wished.

Eugene met only one millionaire whose performances in public satisfied him, and he, unhappily, was crazy. His name was Simon.

Simon, when Eugene first saw him, was a man of almost fifty years. He had a strong, rather heavy figure of middling height, a lean brown face, with shadowy hollows across the cheeks, always closely shaven, but sometimes badly scarred by his gouging fingernails, and a long thin mouth that curved slightly downward, subtle, sensitive, lighting his whole face at times with blazing demoniac glee. He had straight abundant hair, heavily grayed, which he kept smartly brushed and flattened at the sides. His clothing was loose and well cut: he wore a dark coat above baggy gray flannels, silk shirts rayed with broad stripes, a collar to match, and a generous loosely knotted tie. His waistcoats were of a ruddy-brown chequered pattern. He had an appearance of great distinction.

Simon and his two keepers first came to Dixieland when difficulties with several of the Altamont hotels forced them to look for private quarters. The men took two rooms and a sleeping-porch, and paid generously.

"Why, pshaw!" said Eliza persuasively to Helen, "I don't believe there's a thing wrong with him. He's as quiet and well-behaved as you please."

At this moment there was a piercing yell upstairs, followed by a long peal of diabolical laughter. Eugene bounded up and down the hall in his exultancy and delight, producing little squealing noises in his throat. Ben, scowling, with a quick flicker of his mouth, drew back his hard white hand swiftly as if to cuff his brother. Instead, he jerked his head sideways to Eliza, and said with a soft, scornful laugh: "By God, mama, I don't see why you have to take them in. You've got enough of them in the family already."

"Mama, in heaven's name—" Helen began furiously. At this moment Gant strode in out of the dusk, carrying a mottled package of pork chops, and muttering rhetorically to himself. There was another long peal of laughter above. He halted abruptly, startled, and lifted his head. Luke, listening attentively at the foot of the stairs, exploded in a loud boisterous guffaw, and the girl, her annoyance changing at once to angry amusement, walked toward her father's inquiring face, and prodded him several times in the ribs.

"Hey?" he said startled. "What is it?"

"Miss Eliza's got a crazy man upstairs," she sniggered, enjoying his amazement.

"Jesus God!" Gant yelled frantically, wetting his big thumb swiftly on his tongue, and glancing up toward his Maker with an attitude of exaggerated supplication in his small gray eyes and the thrust of his huge bladelike nose. Then, letting his arms slap heavily at his sides, in a gesture of defeat, he began to walk rapidly back and forth, clucking his deprecation loudly. Eliza stood solidly, looking from one to another, her lips working rapidly, her white face hurt and bitter.

There was another long howl of mirth above. Gant paused, caught Helen's eye, and began to grin suddenly in an unwilling sheepish manner.

"God have mercy on us," he chuckled. "She'll have the place filled with all of Barnum's freaks the next thing you know."

At this moment, Simon, self-contained, distinguished and grave in his manner, descended the steps with Mr. Gilroy and Mr. Flannagan, his companions. The two guards were red in the face, and breathed stertorously as if from some recent exertion. Simon, however, preserved his habitual appearance of immaculate and well-washed urbanity.

"Good evening," he remarked suavely. "I hope I have not kept you waiting long." He caught sight of Eugene.

"Come here, my boy," he said very kindly.

"It's all right," remarked Mr. Gilroy, encouragingly. "He wouldn't hurt a fly."

Eugene moved into the presence.

"And what is your name, young man?" said Simon with his beautiful devil's smile.

"Eugene."

"That's a very fine name," said Simon. "Always try to live up to it." He thrust his hand carelessly and magnificently into his coat pocket, drawing out under the boy's astonished eyes, a handful of shining five and ten-cent pieces.

"Always be good to the birds, my boy," said Simon, and he poured the money into Eugene's cupped hands.

Every one looked doubtfully at Mr. Gilroy.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Mr. Gilroy cheerfully. "He'll never miss it. There's lots more where that came from."

"He's a mul-tye-millionaire," Mr. Flannagan explained proudly. "We give him four or five dollars in small change every morning just to throw away."

Simon caught sight of Gant for the first time.

"Look out for the Stingaree," he cried. "Remember the Maine."

"I tell you what," said Eliza laughing. "He's not so crazy as you think."

"That's right," said Mr. Gilroy, noting Gant's grin. "The Stingaree's a fish. They have them in Florida."

"Don't forget the birds, my friends," said Simon, going out with his companions. "Be good to the birds."

They became very fond of him. Somehow he fitted into the pattern of their life. None of them was uncomfortable in the presence of madness. In the flowering darkness of Spring, prisoned in a room, his satanic laughter burst suddenly out: Eugene listened, thrilled, and slept, unable to forget the smile of dark flowering evil, the loose pocket chinking heavily with coins.

Night, the myriad rustle of tiny wings. Heard lapping water of the inland seas.

—And the air will be filled with warm-throated plum-dropping bird-notes. He was almost twelve. He was done with childhood. As that Spring ripened he felt entirely, for the first time, the full delight of loneliness. Sheeted in his thin nightgown, he stood in darkness by the orchard window of the back room at Gant's, drinking the sweet air down, exulting in his isolation in darkness, hearing the strange wail of the whistle going west.

The prison walls of self had closed entirely round him; he was walled completely by the esymplastic power of his imagination—he had learned by now to project mechanically, before the world, an acceptable counterfeit of himself which would protect him from intrusion. He no longer went through the torment of the recess flight and pursuit. He was now in one of the upper grades of grammar school, he was one of the Big Boys. His hair had been cut when he was nine years old, after a bitter siege against Eliza's obstinacy. He no longer suffered because of the curls. But he had grown like a weed, he already topped his mother by an inch or two; his body was big-boned but very thin and fragile, with no meat on it; his legs were absurdly long, thin, and straight, giving him a curious scissored look as he walked with long bounding strides.

Stuck on a thin undeveloped neck beneath a big wide-browed head covered thickly by curling hair which had changed, since his infancy, from a light maple to dark brown-black, was a face so small, and so delicately sculptured, that it seemed not to belong to its body. The strangeness, the remote quality of this face was enhanced by its brooding fabulous concentration, by its passionate dark intensity, across which every splinter of thought or sensation flashed like a streak of light across a pool. The mouth was full, sensual, extraordinarily mobile, the lower lip deeply scooped and pouting. His rapt dreaming intensity set the face usually in an expression of almost sullen contemplation; he smiled, oftener than he laughed, inwardly, at some extravagant invention, or some recollection of the absurd, now fully appreciated for the first time. He did not open his lips to smile—there was a swift twisted flicker across his mouth. His thick heavily arched eyebrows grew straight across the base of his nose.

That Spring he was more alone than ever. Eliza's departure for Dixieland three or four years before, and the disruption of established life at Gant's, had begun the loosening of his first friendships with the neighborhood boys, Harry Tarkinton, Max

Isaacs, and the others, and had now almost completely severed them. Occasionally he saw these boys again, occasionally he resumed again, at sporadic intervals, his association with them, but he now had no steady companionship, he had only a series of associations with children whose parents stayed for a time at Dixieland, with Tim O'Doyle, whose mother ran the Brunswick, with children here and there who briefly held his interest.

But he became passionately bored with them, plunged into a miasmic swamp of weariness and horror, after a time, because of the dulness and ugliness of their lives, their minds, their amusements. Dull people filled him with terror: he was never so much frightened by tedium in his own life as in the lives of others —his early distaste for Pett Pentland and her grim rusty aunts came from submerged memories of the old house on Central Avenue, the smell of mellow apples and medicine in the hot room, the swooping howl of the wind outside, and the endless monotone of their conversation on disease, death, and misery. He was filled with terror and anger against them because they were able to live, to thrive, in this horrible depression that sickened him.

Thus, the entire landscape, the whole physical background of his life, was now dappled by powerful prejudices of liking and distaste formed, God knows how, or by what intangible affinities of thought, feeling and connotation. Thus, one street would seem to him to be a "good street"—to exist in the rich light of cheerful, abundant, and high-hearted living; another, inexplicably, a "bad street," touching him somehow with fear, hopelessness, depression.

Perhaps the cold red light of some remembered winter's afternoon, waning pallidly over a playing-field, with all its mockery of Spring, while lights flared up smokily in houses, the rabble-rout of children dirtily went in to supper, and men came back to the dull but warm imprisonment of home, oil lamps (which he hated), and bedtime, clotted in him a hatred of the place which remained even when the sensations that caused it were forgotten.

Or, returning from some country walk in late autumn, he would come back from Cove or Valley with dewy nose, clotted boots, the smell of a mashed persimmon on his knee. and the odor of wet earth and grass on the palms of his hands, and with a stubborn dislike and suspicion of the scene he had visited, and fear of the people who lived there.

He had the most extraordinary love of incandescence. He hated dull lights, smoky lights, soft, or sombre lights. At night he wanted to be in rooms brilliantly illuminated with beautiful, blazing, sharp, poignant lights. After that, the dark.

He played games badly, although he took a violent interest in sports. Max Isaacs continued to interest him as an athlete long after he had ceased to interest him as a person. The game Max Isaacs excelled in was baseball. Usually he played one of the outfield positions, ranging easily about in his field, when a ball was hit to him, with the speed of a panther, making impossible catches with effortless grace. He was a terrific hitter, standing at the plate casually but alertly, and meeting the ball squarely with a level swinging smack of his heavy shoulders. Eugene tried vainly to imitate the precision and power of this movement, which drove the ball in a smoking arc out of the lot, but he was never able: he chopped down clumsily and blindly, knocking a futile bounder to some nimble baseman. In the field he was equally useless: he never learned to play in a team, to become a limb of that single animal which united telepathically in a concerted movement. He became nervous, highly excited, and erratic in team-play, but he spent hours alone with another boy, or, after the mid-day meal, with Ben, passing a ball back and forth.

He developed blinding speed, bending all the young suppleness of his long thin body behind the ball, exulting as it smoked into the pocket of the mitt with a loud smack, or streaked up with a sharp dropping curve. Ben, taken by surprise by a fast drop, would curse him savagely, and in a rage hurl the ball back into his thin gloved hand. In the Spring and Summer he went as often as he could afford it, or was invited, to the baseball games in the district league, a fanatic partisan of the town club and its best players, making a fantasy constantly of himself in a heroic game-saving rôle.

But he was in no way able to submit himself to the discipline, the hard labor, the acceptance of defeat and failure that make a good athlete; he wanted always to win, he wanted always to be the general, the heroic spear-head of victory. And after that he wanted to be loved. Victory and love. In all of his swarming fantasies Eugene saw himself like this—unbeaten and beloved. But moments of clear vision returned to him when all the defeat and misery of his life was revealed. He saw his gangling and absurd figure, his remote unpractical brooding face, too like a dark strange flower to arouse any feeling among his companions and his kin, he thought, but discomfort, bitterness, and mockery; he remembered, with a drained sick heart, the countless humiliations, physical and verbal, he had endured, at the hands of school and family, before the world, and as he thought, the horns of victory died within the wood, the battle-drums of triumph stopped, the proud clangor of the gongs quivered away in silence. His eagles had flown; he saw himself, in a moment of reason, as a madman playing Cæsar. He craned his head aside and covered his face with his hand.

XVI

The Spring grew ripe. There was at mid-day a soft drowsiness in the sun. Warm sporting gusts of wind howled faintly at the eaves; the young grass bent; the daisies twinkled.

He pressed his high knees uncomfortably against the bottom of his desk, grew nostalgic on his dreams. Bessie Barnes scrawled vigorously two rows away, displaying her long full silken leg. Open for me the gates of delight. Behind her sat a girl named Ruth, dark, with milk-white skin, eyes as gentle as her name, and thick black hair, parted in the middle. He thought of a wild life with Bessie and of a later resurrection, a pure holy life, with Ruth.

One day, after the noon recess, they were marshalled by the teachers—all of the children in the three upper grades—and marched upstairs to the big assembly hall. They were excited, and gossiped in low voices as they went. They had never been called upstairs at this hour. Quite often the bells rang in the halls: they sprang quickly into line and were marched out in double files. That was fire drill. They liked that. Once they emptied the building in four minutes.

This was something new. They marched into the big room and sat down in blocks of seats assigned to each class: they sat with a seat between each of them. In a moment the door of the principal's office on the left—where little boys were beaten—was opened, and the principal came out. He walked around the corner of the big room and stepped softly up on the platform. He began to talk.

He was a new principal. Young Armstrong, who had smelled the flower so delicately, and who had visited Daisy, and who once had almost beaten Eugene because of the smutty rhymes, was gone. The new principal was older. He was about thirty-eight years old. He was a strong rather heavy man a little under six feet tall; he was one of a large family who had grown up on a Tennessee farm. His father was poor but he had helped his children to get an education. All this Eugene knew already, because the principal made long talks to them in the morning and said he had never had their advantages. He pointed to himself with some pride. And he urged the little boys, playfully but earnestly, to "be not like dumb driven cattle, be a hero in the strife." That was poetry, Longfellow.

The principal had thick powerful shoulders; clumsy white arms, knotted with big awkward country muscles. Eugene had seen him once hoeing in the schoolyard; each of them had been given a plant to set out. He got those muscles on the farm. The boys said he beat very hard. He walked with a clumsy stealthy tread—awkward and comical enough, it is true, but he could be up at a boy's back before you knew it. Otto Krause called him Creeping Jesus. The name stuck, among the tough crowd. Eugene was a little shocked by it.

The principal had a white face of waxen transparency, with deep flat cheeks like the Pentlands, a pallid nose, a trifle deeper in its color than his face, and a thin slightly-bowed mouth. His hair was coarse, black, and thick, but he never let it grow too long. He had short dry hands, strong, and always coated deeply with chalk. When he passed near by, Eugene got the odor of chalk and of the schoolhouse: his heart grew cold with excitement and fear. The sanctity of chalk and school hovered about the man's flesh. He was the one who could touch without being touched, beat without being beaten. Eugene had terrible fantasies of resistance, shuddering with horror as he thought of the awful consequences of fighting back: something like God's fist in lightning. Then he looked around cautiously to see if any one had noticed.

The principal's name was Leonard. He made long speeches to the children every morning, after a ten-minute prayer. He had a high sonorous countrified voice which often trailed off in a comical drawl; he got lost very easily in revery, would pause in the middle of a sentence, gaze absently off with his mouth half-open and an expression of stupefaction on his face, and return presently to the business before him, his mind still loose, with witless distracted laugh.

He talked to the children aimlessly, pompously, dully for twenty minutes every morning: the teachers yawned carefully behind their hands, the students made furtive drawings, or passed notes. He spoke to them of "the higher life" and of "the things of the mind." He assured them that they were the leaders of to-morrow and the hope of the world. Then he quoted Longfellow.

He was a good man, a dull man, a man of honor. He had a broad streak of coarse earthy brutality in him. He loved a farm better than anything in the world except a school. He had rented a big dilapidated house in a grove of lordly oaks on the outskirts of town: he lived there with his wife and his two children. He had a cow—he was never without a cow: he would go out at night and morning to milk her, laughing his vacant silly laugh, and giving her a good smacking kick in the belly to make her come round into position.

He was a heavy-handed master. He put down rebellion with good cornfield violence. If a boy was impudent to him he would rip him powerfully from his seat, drag his wriggling figure into his office, breathing stertorously as he walked along at his clumsy rapid gait, and saying roundly, in tones of scathing contempt: "Why, you young upstart, we'll just see who's master here. I'll just show you, my sonny, if I'm to be dictated to by every two-by-four whippersnapper who comes along." And once within the office, with the glazed door shut, he published the stern warning of his justice by the loud exertion of his breathing, the cutting swish of his rattan, and the yowls of pain and terror that he exacted from his captive.

He had called the school together that day to command it to write him a composition. The children sat, staring dumbly up at him as he made a rambling explanation of what he wanted. Finally he announced a prize. He would give five dollars from his own pocket to the student who wrote the best paper. That aroused them. There was a rustle of interest.

They were to write a paper on the meaning of a French picture called The Song of the Lark. It represented a French peasant girl, barefooted, with a sickle in one hand, and with face upturned in the morning-light of the fields as she listened to the bird-song. They were asked to describe what they saw in the expression of the girl's face. They were asked to tell what the picture meant to them. It had been reproduced in one of their readers. A larger print was now hung up on the platform for their inspection. Sheets of yellow paper were given them. They stared, thoughtfully masticating their pencils. Finally, the room was silent save for a minute scratching on paper.

The warm wind spouted about the eaves; the grasses bent, whistling gently.

Eugene wrote: "The girl is hearing the song of the first lark. She knows that it means Spring has come. She is about seventeen or eighteen years old. Her people are very poor, she has never been anywhere. In the winter she wears wooden shoes. She is making out as if she was going to whistle. But she doesn't let on to the bird that she has heard him. The rest of her people are behind her, coming down the field, but we do not see them. She has a father, a mother, and two brothers. They have worked hard all their life. The girl is the youngest child. She thinks she would like to go away somewhere and see the world. Sometimes she hears the whistle of a train that is going to Paris. She has never ridden on a train in her life. She would like to go to Paris. She would like to have some fine clothes, she would like to travel. Perhaps she would like to start life new in America, the Land of Opportunity. The girl has had a hard time. Her people do not understand her. If they saw her listening to the lark they would poke fun at her. She has never had the advantages of a good education, her people are so poor, but she would profit by her opportunity if she did, more than some people who have. You can tell by looking at her that she's intelligent."

It was early in May; examinations came in another two weeks. He thought of them with excitement and pleasure—he liked the period of hard cramming, the long reviews, the delight of emptying out abundantly on paper his stored knowledge. The big assembly room had about it the odor of completion, of sharp nervous ecstasy. All through the summer it would be drowsy-warm; if only here, alone, with the big plaster cast of Minerva, himself and Bessie Barnes, or Miss—Miss——

"We want this boy," said Margaret Leonard. She handed Eugene's paper over to her husband. They were starting a private school for boys. That was what the paper had been for.

Leonard took the paper, pretended to read half a page, looked off absently into eternity, and began to rub his chin reflectively, leaving a slight coating of chalk-dust on his face. Then, catching her eye, he laughed idiotically, and said: "Why, that little rascal! Huh? Do you suppose——?"

Feeling delightfully scattered, he bent over with a long suction of whining laughter, slapping his knee and leaving a chalk print, making a slobbering noise in his mouth.

"The Lord have mercy!" he gasped.

"Here! Never you mind about that," she said, laughing with tender sharp amusement. "Pull yourself together and see this boy's people." She loved the man dearly, and he loved her.

A few days later Leonard assembled the children a second time. He made a rambling speech, the purport of which was to inform them that one of them had won the prize, but to conceal the winner's name. Then, after several divagations, which he thoroughly enjoyed, he read Eugene's paper, announced his name, and called him forward.

Chalkface took chalkhand. The boy's heart thundered against his ribs. The proud horns blared, he tasted glory.

Patiently, all through the summer, Leonard laid siege to Gant and Eliza. Gant fidgeted, spoke shiftily, finally said:

"You'll have to see his mother." Privately he was bitterly scornful, roared the merits of the public school as an incubator of citizenship. The family was contemptuous. Private school! Mr. Vanderbilt! Ruin him for good!

Which made Eliza reflective. She had a good streak of snobbism. Mr. Vanderbilt? She was as good as any of them. They'd just see.

"Who are you going to have?" she asked. "Have you drummed any one up yet?"

Leonard mentioned the sons of several fashionable and wealthy people,—of Dr. Kitchen, the eye, ear, nose and throat man, Mr. Arthur, the corporation lawyer, and Bishop Raper, of the Episcopal diocese.

Eliza grew more reflective. She thought of Pett. She needn't give herself airs.

"How much are you asking?" she said.

He told her the tuition was one hundred dollars a year. She pursed her lips lingeringly before she answered.

"Hm-m!" she began, with a bantering smile, as she looked at Eugene. "That's a whole lot of money. You know," she continued with her tremulous smile, "as the darkey says, we're pore-folks."

Eugene squirmed.

"Well what about it, boy?" said Eliza banteringly. "Do you think you're worth that much money?"

Mr. Leonard placed his white dry hand upon Eugene's shoulders, affectionately sliding it down his back and across his kidneys, leaving white chalk prints everywhere. Then he clamped his meaty palm tightly around the slender bracelet of boy-arm.

"That boy's worth it," he said, shaking him gently to and fro. "Yes, sir!"

Eugene smiled painfully. Eliza continued to purse her lips. She felt a strong psychic relation to Leonard. They both took time.

"Say," she said, rubbing her broad red nose, and smiling slyly, "I used to be a school-teacher. You didn't know that, did you? But I didn't get any such prices as you're asking," she added. "I thought myself mighty lucky if I got my board and twenty dollars a month."

"Is that so, Mrs. Gant?" said Mr. Leonard with great interest. "Well, sir!" He began to laugh in a vague whine, pulling Eugene about more violently and deadening his arm under his crushing grip.

"Yes," said Eliza, "I remember my father—it was long before you were born, boy," she said to Eugene, "for I hadn't laid eyes on your papa—as the feller says, you were nothing but a dish-rag hanging out in heaven—I'd have laughed at any one who suggested marriage then— Well, I tell you what [she shook her head with a sad pursed deprecating mouth], we were mighty poor at the time, I can tell you.—I was thinking about it the other day—many's the time we didn't have food in the house for the next meal.—Well, as I was saying, your grandfather [addressing Eugene] came home one night and said—Look here, what about it?—Who do you suppose I saw to-day?—I remember him just as plain as if I saw him standing here—I had a feeling

—[addressing Leonard with a doubtful smile] I don't know what you'd call it but it's pretty strange when you come to think about it, isn't it?—I had just finished helping Aunt Jane set the table—she had come all the way from Yancey County to visit your grandmother—when all of a sudden it flashed over me—mind you [to Leonard] I never looked out the window or anything but I knew just as well as I knew anything that he was coming—mercy I cried—here he comes—why what on earth are you talking about, Eliza? said your grandma—I remember she went to the door and looked out down the path—there's no one there—He's acoming, I said—wait and see—Who? said your grandmother—Why, father, I said—he's carrying something on his shoulder—and sure enough—I had no sooner got the words out of my mouth than there he was just acoming it for all he was worth, up the path, with a tow-sack full of apples on his back—you could tell by the way he walked that he had news of some sort—well—sure enough—without stopping to say howdy-do—I remembered he began to talk almost before he got into the house—O father, I called out—you've brought the apples—it was the year after I had almost died of pneumonia—I'd been spitting up blood ever since—and having hemorrhages—and I asked him to bring me some apples—Well sir, mother said to him, and she looked mighty queer, I can tell you—that's the strangest thing I ever heard of—and she told him what had happened—Well, he looked pretty serious and said—Yes, I'll never forget the way he said it—I reckon she saw me. I wasn't there but I was thinking of being there and coming up the path at that very moment—I've got news for you he said—who do you suppose I saw to-day—why, I've no idea, I said—why old Professor Truman—he came rushing up to me in town and said, see here: where's Eliza—I've got a job for her if she wants it, teaching school this winter out on Beaverdam—why, pshaw, said your grandfather, she's never taught school a day in her life—and Professor Truman laughed just as big as you please and said never you mind about that—Eliza can do anything she sets her mind on—well sir, that's the way it all came about." High-sorrowful and sad, she paused for a moment, adrift, her white face slanting her life back through the aisled grove of years.

"Well, sir!" said Mr. Leonard vaguely, rubbing his chin. "You young rascal, you!" he said, giving Eugene another jerk, and beginning to laugh with narcissistic pleasure.

Eliza pursed her lips slowly.

"Well," she said, "I'll send him to you for a year." That was the way she did business. Tides run deep in Sargasso.

So, on the hairline of million-minded impulse, destiny bore down on his life again.

Mr. Leonard had leased an old pre-war house, set on a hill wooded by magnificent trees. It faced west and south, looking toward Biltburn, and abruptly down on South End, and the negro flats that stretched to the depot. One day early in September he took Eugene there. They walked across town, talking weightily of politics, across the Square, down Hatton Avenue, south into Church, and southwesterly along the bending road that ended in the schoolhouse on the abutting hill.

The huge trees made sad autumn music as they entered the grounds. In the broad hall of the squat rambling old house Eugene for the first time saw Margaret Leonard. She held a broom in her hands, and was aproned. But his first impression was of her shocking fragility.

Margaret Leonard at this time was thirty-four years old. She had borne two children, a son who was now six years old, and a daughter who was two. As she stood there, with her long slender fingers splayed about the broomstick, he noted, with a momentary cold nausea, that the tip of her right index finger was flattened out as if it had been crushed beyond healing by a hammer. But it was years before he knew that tuberculars sometimes have such fingers.

Margaret Leonard was of middling height, five feet six inches perhaps. As the giddiness of his embarrassment wore off, he saw that she could not weigh more than eighty or ninety pounds. He had heard of the children. Now he remembered them, and Leonard's white muscular bulk, with a sense of horror. His swift vision leaped at once to the sexual relation, and something in him twisted aside, incredulous and afraid.

She had on a dress of crisp gray gingham, not loose or lapping round her wasted figure, but hiding every line in her body, like a draped stick.

As his mind groped out of the pain of impression he heard her voice and, still feeling within him the strange convulsive shame, he lifted his eyes to her face. It was the most tranquil and the most passionate face he had ever seen. The skin was sallow with a dead ashen tinge; beneath, the delicate bone-carving of face and skull traced itself clearly: the cadaverous tightness of those who are about to die had been checked. She had won her way back just far enough to balance carefully in the scales of disease and recovery. It was necessary for her to measure everything she did.

Her thin face was given a touch of shrewdness and decision by the straight line of her nose, the fine long carving of her chin. Beneath the sallow minutely pitted skin in her cheeks, and about her mouth, several frayed nerve-centres twitched from moment to moment, jarring the skin slightly without contorting or destroying the passionate calm beauty that fed her inexhaustibly from within. This face was the constant field of conflict, nearly always calm, but always reflecting the incessant struggle and victory of the enormous energy that inhabited her, over the thousand jangling devils of depletion and weariness that tried to pull her apart. There was always written upon her the epic poetry of beauty and repose out of struggle—he never ceased to feel that she had her hand around the reins of her heart, that gathered into her grasp were all the straining wires and sinews of disunion which would scatter and unjoint her members, once she let go. Literally, physically, he felt that, the great tide of valiance once flowed out of her, she would immediately go to pieces.

She was like some great general, famous, tranquil, wounded unto death, who, with his fingers clamped across a severed artery, stops for an hour the ebbing of his life—sends on the battle.

Her hair was coarse and dull-brown, fairly abundant, tinged lightly with gray: it was combed evenly in the middle and bound tightly in a knot behind. Everything about her was very clean, like a scrubbed kitchen board: she took his hand, he felt the firm nervous vitality of her fingers, and he noticed how clean and scrubbed her thin somewhat labor-worn hands were. If he noticed her emaciation at all now, it was only with a sense of her purification: he felt himself in union not with disease, but with the greatest health he had ever known. She made a high music in him. His heart lifted.

"This," said Mr. Leonard, stroking him gently across the kidneys, "is Mister Eugene Gant."

"Well, sir," she said, in a low voice, in which a vibrant wire was thrumming, "I'm glad to know you." The voice had in it that quality of quiet wonder that he had sometimes heard in the voices of people who had seen or were told of some strange event, or coincidence, that seemed to reach beyond life, beyond nature—a note of acceptance; and suddenly he knew that all life seemed eternally strange to this woman, that she looked directly into the beauty and the mystery and the tragedy in the hearts of men, and that he seemed beautiful to her.

Her face darkened with the strange passionate vitality that left no print, that lived there bodiless like life; her brown eyes darkened into black as if a bird had flown through them and left the shadow of its wings. She saw his small remote face burning strangely at the end of his long unfleshed body, she saw the straight thin shanks, the big feet turned awkwardly inward, the dusty patches on his stockings at the knees, and his thin wristy arms that stuck out painfully below his cheap ill-fitting jacket; she saw the thin hunched line of his shoulders, the tangled mass of hair—and she did not laugh.

He turned his face up to her as a prisoner who recovers light, as a man long pent in darkness who bathes himself in the great pool of dawn, as a blind man who feels upon his eyes the white core and essence of immutable brightness. His body drank in her great light as a famished castaway the rain: he closed his eyes and let the great light bathe him, and when he opened them again, he saw that her own were luminous and wet.

Then she began to laugh. "Why, Mr. Leonard," she said, "what in the world! He's almost as tall as you. Here, boy. Stand up here while I measure." Deft-fingered, she put them back to back. Mr. Leonard was two or three inches taller than Eugene. He began to whine with laughter.

"Why, the rascal," he said. "That little shaver."

"How old are you, boy?" she asked.

"I'll be twelve next month," he said.

"Well, what do you know about that!" she said wonderingly. "I tell you what, though," she continued. "We've got to get some meat on those bones. You can't go around like that. I don't like the way you look." She shook her head.

He was uncomfortable, disturbed, vaguely resentful. It embarrassed and frightened him to be told that he was "delicate"; it touched sharply on his pride.

She took him into a big room on the left that had been fitted out as a living-room and library. She watched his face light with eagerness as he saw the fifteen hundred or two thousand books shelved away in various places. He sat down clumsily in a wicker chair by the table and waited until she returned, bringing him a plate of sandwiches and a tall glass full of clabber, which he had never tasted before.

When he had finished, she drew a chair near to his, and sat down. She had previously sent Leonard out on some barnyard errands; he could be heard from time to time shouting in an authoritative country voice to his live stock.

"Well, tell me boy," she said, "what have you been reading?"

Craftily he picked his way across the waste land of printery, naming as his favorites those books which he felt would win her approval. As he had read everything, good and bad, that the town library contained, he was able to make an impressive showing. Sometimes she stopped him to question about a book—he rebuilt the story richly with a blazing tenacity of detail that satisfied her wholly. She was excited and eager—she saw at once how abundantly she could feed this ravenous hunger for knowledge, experience, wisdom. And he knew suddenly the joy of obedience: the wild ignorant groping, the blind hunt, the desperate baffled desire was now to be ruddered, guided, controlled. The way through the passage to India, that he had never been able to find, would now be charted for him. Before he went away she had given him a fat volume of nine hundred pages, shot through with spirited engravings of love and battle, of the period he loved best.

He was drowned deep at midnight in the destiny of the man who killed the bear, the burner of windmills and the scourge of banditry, in all the life of road and tavern in the Middle Ages, in valiant and beautiful Gerard, the seed of genius, the father of Erasmus. Eugene thought *The Cloister and the Hearth* the best story he had ever read.

The Altamont Fitting School was the greatest venture of their lives. All the delayed success that Leonard had dreamed of as a younger man he hoped to realize now. For him the school was independence, mastership, power, and, he hoped, prosperity. For her, teaching was its own exceeding great reward—her lyric music, her life, the world in which plastically she built to beauty what was good, the lord of her soul that gave her spirit life while he broke her body.

In the cruel volcano of the boy's mind, the little brier moths of his idolatry wavered in to their strange marriage and were consumed. One by one the merciless years reaped down his gods and captains. What had lived up to hope? What had withstood the scourge of growth and memory? Why had the gold become so dim? All of his life, it seemed, his blazing loyalties began with men and ended with images; the life he leaned on melted below his weight, and looking down, he saw he clasped a statue; but enduring, a victorious reality amid his shadow-haunted heart, she remained, who first had touched his blinded eyes with light, who nested his hooded houseless soul. She remained.

O death in life that turns our men to stone! O change that levels down our gods! If only one lives yet, above the cinders of the consuming years, shall not this dust awaken, shall not dead faith revive, shall we not see God again, as once in morning, on the mountain? Who walks with us on the hills?

XVII

Eugene spent the next four years of his life in Leonard's school. Against the bleak horror of Dixieland, against the dark road of pain and death down which the great limbs of Gant had already begun to slope, against all the loneliness and imprisonment of his own life which had gnawed him like hunger, these years at Leonard's bloomed like golden apples.

From Leonard he got little—a dry campaign over an arid waste of Latin prose: first, a harsh, stiff, unintelligent skirmishing among the rules of grammar, which frightened and bewildered him needlessly, and gave him for years an unhealthy dislike of syntax, and an absurd prejudice against the laws on which the language was built. Then, a year's study of the lean, clear precision of Cæsar, the magnificent structure of the style—the concision, the skeleton certainty, deadened by the disjointed daily partition, the dull parsing, the lumbering *cliché* of pedantic translation:

"Having done all things that were necessary, and the season now being propitious for carrying on war, Cæsar began to arrange his legions in battle array."

All the dark pageantry of war in Gaul, the thrust of the Roman spear through the shield of hide, the barbaric parleys in the forests, and the proud clangor of triumph—all that might have been supplied in the story of the great realist, by one touch of the transforming passion with which a great teacher projects his work, was lacking.

Instead, glibly, the wheels ground on into the hard rut of method and memory. March 12, last year—three days late. *Cogitata.* Neut. pl. of participle used as substantive. *Quo* used instead of *ut* to express purpose when comparative follows. Eighty lines for to-morrow.

They spent a weary age, two years, on that dull dog, Cicero. *De Senectute. De Amicitia.* They skirted Virgil because John Dorsey Leonard was a bad sailor—he was not at all sure of Virgilian navigation. He hated exploration. He distrusted voyages.

Next year, he said. And the great names of Ovid, lord of the elves and gnomes, the Bacchic piper of *Amores,* or of Lucretius, full of the rhythm of tides. *Nox est perpetua.*

"Huh?" drawled Mr. Leonard, vacantly beginning to laugh. He was fingermarked with chalk from chin to crotch. Stephen ("Pap") Rheinhart leaned forward gently and fleshed his pen-point in Eugene Gant's left rump. Eugene grunted painfully.

"Why, no," said Mr. Leonard, stroking his chin. "A different sort of Latin."

"What sort?" Tom Davis insisted. "Harder than Cicero?"

"Well," said Mr. Leonard, dubiously, "different. A little beyond you at present."

"—est perpetua. Una dormienda. Luna dies et nox."

"Is Latin poetry hard to read?" Eugene said.

"Well," said Mr. Leonard, shaking his head. "It's not easy. Horace—" he began carefully.

"He wrote Odes and Epodes," said Tom Davis. "What is an Epode, Mr. Leonard?"

"Why," said Mr. Leonard reflectively, "it's a form of poetry."

"Hell!" said "Pap" Rheinhart in a rude whisper to Eugene. "I knew that before I paid tuition."

Smiling lusciously, and stroking himself with gentle fingers, Mr. Leonard turned back to the lesson.

"Now let me see," he began.

"Who was Catullus?" Eugene shouted violently. Like a flung spear in his brain, the name.

"He was a poet," Mr. Leonard answered thoughtlessly, quickly, startled. He regretted.

"What sort of poetry did he write?" asked Eugene.

There was no answer.

"Was it like Horace?"

"No-o," said Mr. Leonard reflectively. "It wasn't exactly like Horace."

"What was it like?" said Tom Davis.

"Like your granny's gut," "Pap" Rheinhart toughly whispered.

"Why—he wrote on topics of general interest in his day," said Mr. Leonard easily.

"Did he write about being in love?" said Eugene in a quivering voice.

Tom Davis turned a surprised face on him.

"Gre-a-at Day!" he exclaimed, after a moment. Then he began to laugh.

"He wrote about being in love," Eugene cried with sudden certain passion. "He wrote about being in love with a lady named Lesbia. Ask Mr. Leonard if you don't believe me."

They turned thirsty faces up to him.

"Why—no—yes—I don't know about all that," said Mr. Leonard, challengingly, confused. "Where'd you hear all this, boy?"

"I read it in a book," said Eugene, wondering where. Like a flung spear, the name.

—Whose tongue was fanged like a serpent, flung spear of ecstasy and passion.

Odi et amo: quare id faciam . . .

"Well, not altogether," said Mr. Leonard. "Some of them," he conceded.

. . . *fortasse requiris. Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.*

"Who was she?" said Tom Davis.

"Oh, it was the custom in those days," said Mr. Leonard carelessly. "Like Dante and Beatrice. It was a way the poet had of paying a compliment."

The serpent whispered. There was a distillation of wild exultancy in his blood. The rags of obedience, servility, reverential awe dropped in a belt around him.

"She was a man's wife!" he said loudly. "That's who she was."

Awful stillness.

"Why—here—who told you that?" said Mr. Leonard, bewildered, but considering matrimony a wild and possibly dangerous myth. "Who told you that, boy?"

"What was she, then?" said Tom Davis pointedly.

"Why—not exactly," Mr. Leonard murmured, rubbing his chin.

"She was a Bad Woman," said Eugene. Then, most desperately, he added: "She was a Little Chippie."

"Pap" Rheinhart drew in his breath sharply.

"What's that, what's that, what's that?" cried Mr. Leonard rapidly when he could speak. Fury boiled up in him. He sprang from his chair. "What did you say, boy?"

But he thought of Margaret and looked down, with a sudden sense of palsy, into the white ruination of boy-face. Too far beyond. He sat down again, shaken.

—Whose foulest cry was shafted with his passion, whose greatest music flowered out of filth——.

> *"Nulla potest mulier tantum se dicere amatam*
> *Vere, quantum a me Lesbia amata mea es."*

"You should be more careful of your talk, Eugene," said Mr. Leonard gently.

"See here!" he exclaimed suddenly, turning with violence to his book. "This is getting no work done. Come on, now!" he said heartily, spitting upon his intellectual hands. "You rascals you!" he said, noting Tom Davis' grin. "I know what you're after—you want to take up the whole period."

Tom Davis' heavy laughter boomed out, mingling with his own whine.

"All right, Tom," said Mr. Leonard briskly, "page 43, section 6, line 15. Begin at that point."

At this moment the bell rang and Tom Davis' laughter filled the room.

Nevertheless, in charted lanes of custom, he gave competent instruction. He would perhaps have had difficulty in constructing a page of Latin prose and verse with which he had not become literally familiar by years of repetition. In Greek, certainly, his deficiency would have been even more marked, but he would have known a second aorist or an optative in the dark (if he had ever met it before). There were two final years of precious Greek: they read the *Anabasis*.

"What's the good of all this stuff?" said Tom Davis argumentatively.

Mr. Leonard was on sure ground here. He understood the value of the classics.

"It teaches a man to appreciate the Finer Things. It gives him the foundations of a liberal education. It trains his mind."

"What good's it going to do him when he goes to work?" said "Pap" Rheinhart. "It's not going to teach him how to grow more corn."

"Well—I'm not so sure of that," said Mr. Leonard with a protesting laugh. "I think it does."

"Pap" Rheinhart looked at him with a comical cock of the head. He had a wry neck, which gave his humorous kindly face a sidelong expression of quizzical maturity.

He had a gruff voice; he was full of rough kindly humor, and chewed tobacco constantly. His father was wealthy. He lived on a big farm in the Cove, ran a dairy and had a foundry in the town. They were unpretending people—German stock.

"Pshaw, Mr. Leonard," said "Pap" Rheinhart. "Are you going to talk Latin to your farmhands?"

"Egibus wantibus a peckibus of cornibus," said Tom Davis with sounding laughter. Mr. Leonard laughed with abstracted appreciation. The joke was his own.

"It trains the mind to grapple with problems of all sorts," he said.

"According to what you say," said Tom Davis, "a man who has studied Greek makes a better plumber than one who hasn't."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Leonard, shaking his head smartly, "you know, I believe he does." He joined, pleased, with their pleasant laughter, a loose slobbering giggle.

He was on trodden ground. They engaged him in long debates: as he ate his lunch, he waved a hot biscuit around, persuasive, sweetly reasonable, exhaustively minute in an effort to prove the connection of Greek and groceries. The great wind of Athens had touched him not at all. Of the delicate and sensuous intelligence of the Greeks, their feminine grace, the constructive power and subtlety of their intelligence, the instability of their character, and the structure, restraint, and perfection of their forms, he said nothing.

He had caught a glimpse, in an American college, of the great structure of the most architectural of languages: he felt the sculptural perfection of such a word as *γυνάικος*,but his opinions smelled of chalk, the classroom, and a very bad lamp—Greek was good because it was ancient, classic, and academic. The smell of the East, the dark tide of the Orient that flowed below, touching the lives of poet and soldier, with something perverse, evil, luxurious, was as far from his life as Lesbos. He was simply the mouthpiece of a formula of which he was assured without having a genuine belief.

καὶ κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν.

The mathematics and history teacher was John Dorsey's sister Amy. She was a powerful woman, five feet ten inches tall, who weighed 185 pounds. She had very thick black hair, straight and oily, and very black eyes, giving a heavy sensuousness to her face. Her thick forearms were fleeced with light down. She was not fat, but she corsetted tightly, her powerful arms and heavy shoulders bulging through the cool white of her shirtwaists. In warm weather she perspired abundantly: her waists were stained below the arm-pits with big spreading blots of sweat; in the winter, as she warmed herself by the fire, she had about her the exciting odor of chalk, and the strong good smell of a healthy animal. Eugene, passing down the wind-swept back porch one day in winter, looked in on her room just as her tiny niece opened the door to come out. She sat before a dancing coal-fire, after her bath, drawing on her stockings. Fascinated, he stared at her broad red shoulders, her big body steaming cleanly like a beast.

She liked the fire and the radiance of warmth: sleepily alert she sat by the stove, with her legs spread, sucking in the heat, her large earth strength more heavily sensuous than her brother's. Stroked by the slow heat-tingle she smiled slowly with indifferent affection on all the boys. No men came to see her: like a pool she was thirsty for lips. She sought no one. With lazy cat-warmth she smiled on all the world.

She was a good teacher of mathematics: number to her was innate. Lazily she took their tablets, worked answers lazily, smiling good-naturedly with contempt. Behind her, at a desk, Durand Jarvis moaned passionately to Eugene, and writhed erotically, gripping the leaf of his desk fiercely.

Sister Sheba arrived with her consumptive husband at the end of the second year—cadaver, flecked lightly on the lips with blood, seventy-three years old. They said he was forty-nine—sickness made him look old. He was a tall man, six feet three, with long straight mustaches, waxen and emaciated as a mandarin. He painted pictures—impressionist blobs—sheep on a gorsey hill, fishboats at the piers, with a warm red jumble of brick buildings in the background.

Old Gloucester Town, Marblehead, Cape Cod Folks, Captains Courageous—the rich salty names came reeking up with a smell of tarred rope, dry codheads rotting in the sun, rocking dories knee-deep in gutted fish, the strong loin-smell of the sea in harbors, and the quiet brooding vacancy of a seaman's face, sign of his marriage with ocean. How look the seas at dawn in Spring? The cold gulls sleep upon the wind. But rose the skies.

They saw the waxen mandarin walk shakily three times up and down the road. It was Spring, there was a south wind high in the big trees. He wavered along on a stick, planted before him with a blue phthisic hand. His eyes were blue and pale as if he had been drowned.

He had begotten two children by Sheba—girls. They were exotic tender blossoms, all black and milky white, as strange and lovely as Spring. The boys groped curiously.

"He must be a better man than he looks yet," said Tom Davis. "The little 'un's only two or three years old."

"He's not as old as he looks," said Eugene. "He looks old because he's been sick. He's only forty-nine."

"How do you know?" said Tom Davis.

"Miss Amy says so," said Eugene innocently.

"Pap" Rheinhart cocked his head on Eugene and carried his quid deftly on the end of his tongue to the other cheek.

"Forty-nine!" he said, "you'd better see a doctor, boy. He's as old as God."

"That's what she said," Eugene insisted doggedly.

"Why, of course she said it!" "Pap" Rheinhart replied. "You don't think they're going to let it out, do you? When they're running a school here."

"Son, you must be simple!" said Jack Candler who had not thought of it up to now.

"Hell, you're their Pet. They know you'll believe whatever they tell you," said Julius Arthur. "Pap" Rheinhart looked at him searchingly, then shook his head as if a cure was impossible. They laughed at his faith.

"Well, if he's so old," said Eugene, "why did old Lady Lattimer marry him?"

"Why, because she couldn't get any one else, of course," said "Pap" Rheinhart, impatient at this obtuseness.

"Do you suppose she has had to keep him up?" said Tom Davis curiously. Silently they wondered. And Eugene, as he saw the two lovely children fall like petals upon their mother's heavy breast, as he saw the waxen artist faltering his last steps to death, and heard Sheba's strong voice levelling a conversation at its beginning, expanding in violent burlesque all of her opinions, was bewildered again before the unsearchable riddle—out of death, life, out of the coarse rank earth, a flower.

His faith was above conviction. Disillusion had come so often that it had awakened in him a strain of bitter suspicion, an occasional mockery, virulent, coarse, cruel, and subtle, which was all the more scalding because of his own pain. Unknowingly, he had begun to build up in himself a vast mythology for which he cared all the more deeply because he realized its untruth. Brokenly, obscurely, he was beginning to feel that it was not truth that men must live for—the creative men—but for falsehood. At times his devouring, unsated brain seemed to be beyond his governance: it was a frightful bird whose beak was in his heart, whose talons tore unceasingly at his bowels. And this unsleeping demon wheeled, plunged, revolved about an object, returning suddenly, after it had flown away, with victorious malice, leaving stripped, mean, and common all that he had clothed with wonder.

But he saw hopefully that he never learned—that what remained was the tinsel and the gold. He was so bitter with his tongue because his heart believed so much.

The merciless brain lay coiled and alert like a snake: it saw every gesture, every quick glance above his head, the shoddy scaffolding of all deception. But these people existed for him in a world remote from human error. He opened one window of his heart to Margaret, together they entered the sacred grove of poetry; but all dark desire, the dream of fair forms, and all the misery, drunkenness, and disorder of his life at home he kept fearfully shut. He was afraid they would hear. Desperately he wondered how many of the boys had heard of it. And all the facts that levelled Margaret down to life, that plunged her in the defiling stream of life, were as unreal and horrible as a nightmare.

That she had been near death from tuberculosis, that the violent and garrulous Sheba had married an old man, who had begotten two children and was now about to die, that the whole little family, powerful in cohesive fidelity, were nursing their great sores in privacy, building up before the sharp eyes and rattling tongues of young boys a barrier of flimsy pretense and evasion, numbed him with a sense of unreality.

Eugene believed in the glory and the gold.

He lived more at Dixieland now. He had been more closely bound to Eliza since he began at Leonard's. Gant, Helen, and Luke were scornful of the private school. The children were resentful of it—a little jealous. And their temper was barbed now with a new sting. They would say:

"You've ruined him completely since you sent him to a private school." Or, "He's too good to soil his hands now that he's quit the public school."

Eliza herself kept him sufficiently reminded of his obligation. She spoke often of the effort she had to make to pay the tuition fee, and of her poverty. She said, he must work hard, and help her all he could in his spare hours. He should also help her through the summer and "drum up trade" among the arriving tourists at the station.

"For God's sake! What's the matter with you?" Luke jeered. "You're not ashamed to do a little honest work, are you?"

This way, sir, for Dixieland. Mrs. Eliza E. Gant, proprietor. Just A Whisper Off The Square, Captain. All the comforts of the Modern Jail. Biscuits and home-made pies just like mother should have made but didn't.

That boy's a hustler.

At the end of Eugene's first year at Leonard's, Eliza told John Dorsey she could no longer afford to pay the tuition. He conferred with Margaret and, returning, agreed to take the boy for half price.

"He can help you drum up new prospects," said Eliza.

"Yes," Leonard agreed, "that's the very thing."

Ben bought a new pair of shoes. They were tan. He paid six dollars for them. He always bought good things. But they burnt the soles of his feet. In a scowling rage he loped to his room and took them off.

"Goddam it!" he yelled, and hurled them at the wall. Eliza came to the door.

"You'll never have a penny, boy, as long as you waste money the way you do. I tell you what, it's pretty bad when you think of it." She shook her head sadly with puckered mouth.

"O for God's sake!" he growled. "Listen to this! By God, you never hear me asking any one for anything, do you?" he burst out in a rage.

She took the shoes and gave them to Eugene.

"It would be a pity to throw away a good pair of shoes," she said. "Try 'em on, boy."

He tried them on. His feet were already bigger than Ben's. He walked about carefully and painfully a few steps.

"How do they feel?" asked Eliza.

"All right, I guess," he said doubtfully. "They're a little tight."

He liked their clean strength, the good smell of leather. They were the best shoes he had ever had.

Ben entered the kitchen.

"You little brute!" he said. "You've a foot like a mule." Scowling, he knelt and touched the straining leather at the toes. Eugene winced.

"Mama, for God's sake," Ben cried out irritably, "don't make the kid wear them if they're too small. I'll buy him a pair myself if you're too stingy to spend the money."

"Why, what's wrong with these?" said Eliza. She pressed them with her fingers. "Why, pshaw!" she said. "There's nothing wrong with them. All shoes are a little tight at first. It won't hurt him a bit."

But he had to give up at the end of six weeks. The hard leather did not stretch, his feet hurt more every day. He limped about more and more painfully until he planted each step woodenly as if he were walking on blocks. His feet were numb and dead, sore on the palms. One day, in a rage, Ben flung him down and took them off. It was several days before he began to walk with ease again. But his toes that had grown through boyhood straight and strong were pressed into a pulp, the bones gnarled, bent and twisted, the nails thick and dead.

"It does seem a pity to throw those good shoes away," sighed Eliza.

But she had strange fits of generosity. He didn't understand.

A girl came down to Altamont from the west. She was from Sevier, a mountain town, she said. She had a big brown body, and the black hair and eyes of a Cherokee Indian.

"Mark my words," said Gant. "That girl's got Cherokee blood in her somewhere."

She took a room, and for days rocked back and forth in a chair before the parlor fire. She was shy, frightened, a little sullen—her manners were country and decorous. She never spoke unless she was spoken to.

Sometimes she was sick and stayed in bed. Eliza took her food then, and was extremely kind to her.

Day after day the girl rocked back and forth, all through the stormy autumn. Eugene could hear her large feet as rhythmically they hit the floor, ceaselessly propelling the rocker. Her name was Mrs. Morgan.

One day as he laid large crackling lumps upon the piled glowing mass of coals, Eliza entered the room. Mrs. Morgan rocked away stolidly. Eliza stood by the fire for a moment, pursing her lips reflectively, and folding her hands quietly upon her stomach. She looked out the window at the stormy sky, the swept windy bareness of the street.

"I tell you what," she said, "it looks like a hard winter for the poor folks."

"Yes'm," said Mrs. Morgan sullenly. She kept on rocking.

Eliza was silent a moment longer.

"Where's your husband?" she asked presently.

"In Sevier," Mrs. Morgan said. "He's a railroad man."

"What's that, what's that?" said Eliza quickly, comically. "A railroad man, you say?" she inquired sharply.

"Yes'm."

"Well, it looks mighty funny to me he hasn't been in to see you," said Eliza, with enormous accusing tranquillity. "I'd call it a pretty poor sort of man who'd act like that."

Mrs. Morgan said nothing. Her tar-black eyes glittered in fireflame.

"Have you got any money?" said Eliza.

"No'm," said Mrs. Morgan.

Eliza stood solidly, enjoying the warmth, pursing her lips. "When do you expect to have your baby?" said Eliza suddenly.

Mrs. Morgan said nothing for a moment. She kept on rocking.

"In less'n a month now, I reckon," she answered.

She had been getting bigger week after week.

Eliza bent over and pulled her skirt up, revealing her leg to the knee, cotton-stockinged and lumpily wadded with her heavy flannels.

"Whew!" she cried out coyly, noticing that Eugene was staring. "Turn your head, boy," she commanded, snickering and rubbing her finger along her nose. The dull green of rolled banknotes shone through her stockings. She pulled the bills out.

"Well, I reckon you'll have to have a little money," said Eliza, peeling off two tens, and giving them to Mrs. Morgan.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Mrs. Morgan, taking the money.

"You can stay here until you're able to work again," said Eliza. "I know a good doctor."

"Mama, in heaven's name," Helen fumed. "Where on earth do you get these people?"

"Merciful God!" howled Gant, "you've had 'em all—blind, lame, crazy, chippies and bastards. They all come here."

Nevertheless, when he saw Mrs. Morgan now, he always made a profound bow, saying with the most florid courtesy:

"How do you do, madam?" Aside, to Helen, he said:

"I tell you what—she's a fine-looking girl."

"Hahahaha," said Helen, laughing in an ironic falsetto, and prodding him, "you wouldn't mind having her yourself, would you?"

"B'God," he said humorously, wetting his thumb, and grinning slyly at Eliza, "she's got a pair of pippins."

Eliza smiled bitterly into popping grease.

"Hm!" she said disdainfully. "I don't care how many he goes with. There's no fool like an old fool. You'd better not be too smart. That's a game two can play at."

"Hahahahaha!" laughed Helen thinly, "she's mad now."

Helen took Mrs. Morgan often to Gant's and cooked great meals for her. She also brought her presents of candy and scented soap from town.

They called in McGuire at the birth of the child. From below Eugene heard the quiet commotion in the upstairs room, the low moans of the woman, and finally a high piercing wail. Eliza, greatly excited, kept kettles seething with hot water constantly over the gas flame of the stove. From time to time she rushed upstairs with a boiling kettle, descending a moment later more slowly, pausing from step to step while she listened attentively to the sounds in the room.

"After all," said Helen, banging kettles about restlessly in the kitchen, "what do we know about her? Nobody can say she hasn't got a husband, can they? They'd better be careful! People have no right to say those things," she cried out irritably against unknown detractors.

It was night. Eugene went out on to the veranda. The air was frosty, clear, not very cold. Above the black bulk of the eastern hills, and in the great bowl of the sky, far bright stars were scintillant as jewels. The light burned brightly in neighborhood houses, as bright and hard as if carved from some cold gem. Across the wide yard-spaces wafted the warm odor of hamburger steak and fried onions. Ben stood at the veranda rail, leaning upon his cocked leg, smoking with deep lung inhalations. Eugene went over and stood by him. They heard the wail upstairs. Eugene snickered, looking up at the thin ivory mask. Ben lifted his white hand sharply to strike him, but dropped it with a growl of contempt, smiling faintly. Far before them, on the top of Birdseye, faint lights wavered in the rich Jew's castle. In the neighborhood there was a slight mist of supper, and frost-far voices.

Deep womb, dark flower. The Hidden. The secret fruit, heart-red, fed by rich Indian blood. Womb-night brooding darkness flowering secretly into life.

Mrs. Morgan went away two weeks after her child was born. He was a little brown-skinned boy, with a tuft of elvish black hair, and very black bright eyes. He was like a little Indian. Before she left Eliza gave her twenty dollars.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I've got folks in Sevier," said Mrs. Morgan.

She went up the street carrying a cheap imitation-crocodile valise. At her shoulder the baby waggled his head, and looked merrily back with his bright black eyes. Eliza waved to him and smiled tremulously; she turned back into the house sniffling, with wet eyes.

Why did she come to Dixieland, I wonder? Eugene thought.

Eliza was good to a little man with a mustache. He had a wife and a little girl nine years old. He was a hotel steward; he was out of work and he stayed at Dixieland until he owed her more than one hundred dollars. But he split kindling neatly, and carried up coal; he did handy jobs of carpentry, and painted up rusty places about the house.

She was very fond of him; he was what she called "a good family man." She liked domestic people; she liked men who were housebroken. The little man was very kind and very tame. Eugene liked him because he made good coffee. Eliza never bothered him about the money. Finally, he got work at the Inn, and quarters there. He paid Eliza all he owed her.

Eugene stayed late at the school, returning in the afternoon at three or four o'clock. Sometimes it was almost dark when he came back to Dixieland. Eliza was fretful at his absences, and brought him his dinner crisped and dried from its long heating in the oven. There was a heavy vegetable soup thickly glutinous with cabbage, beans, and tomatoes, and covered on top with big grease blisters. There would also be warmed-over beef, pork or chicken, a dish full of cold lima beans, biscuits, slaw, and coffee.

But the school had become the centre of his heart and life—Margaret Leonard his spiritual mother. He liked to be there most in the afternoons when the crowd of boys had gone, and when he was free to wander about the old house, under the singing majesty of great trees, exultant in the proud solitude of that fine hill, the clean windy rain of the acorns, the tang of burning leaves. He would read wolfishly until Margaret discovered him and drove him out under the trees or toward the flat court behind Bishop Raper's residence at the entrance, which was used for basketball. Here, while the western sky reddened, he raced down toward the goal, passing the ball to a companion, exulting in his growing swiftness, agility, and expertness in shooting the basket.

Margaret Leonard watched his health jealously, almost morbidly, warning him constantly of the terrible consequences that followed physical depletion, the years required to build back what had once been thrown carelessly away.

"Look here, boy!" she would begin, stopping him in a quiet boding voice. "Come in here a minute. I want to talk to you."

Somewhat frightened, extremely nervous, he would sit down beside her.

"How much sleep have you been getting?" she asked.

Hopefully, he said nine hours a night. That should be about right.

"Well, make it ten," she commanded sternly. "See here, 'Gene, you simply can't afford to take chances with your health. Lordy, boy, I know what I'm talking about. I've had to pay the price, I tell you. You can't do anything in this world without your health, boy."

"But I'm all right," he protested desperately, frightened. "There's nothing wrong with me."

"You're not strong, boy. You've got to get some meat on your bones. I tell you what, I'm worried by those circles under your eyes. Do you keep regular hours?"

He did not: he hated regular hours. The excitement, the movement, the constant moments of crisis at Gant's and Eliza's had him keyed to their stimulation. The order and convention of domestic life he had never known. He was desperately afraid of regularity. It meant dulness and inanition to him. He loved the hour of midnight.

But obediently he promised her that he would be regular—regular in eating, sleeping, studying, and exercising.

But he had not yet learned to play with the crowd. He still feared, disliked and distrusted them.

He shrank from the physical conflict of boy life, but knowing her eye was upon him he plunged desperately into their games, his frail strength buffeted in the rush of strong legs, the heavy jar of strong bodies, picking himself up bruised and sore at heart to follow and join again the mill of the burly pack. Day after day to the ache of his body was added the ache and shame of his spirit, but he hung on with a pallid smile across his lips, and envy and fear of their strength in his heart. He parroted faithfully all that John Dorsey had to say about the "spirit of fair play," "sportsmanship," "playing the game for the game's sake," "accepting defeat or victory with a smile," and so on, but he had no genuine belief or understanding. These phrases were current among all the boys at the school—they had been made somewhat too conscious of them and, as he listened, at times the old, inexplicable shame returned—he craned his neck and drew one foot sharply off the ground.

And Eugene noted, with the old baffling shame again, as this cheap tableau of self-conscious, robust, and raucously aggressive boyhood was posed, that, for all the mouthing of phrases, the jargon about fair play and sportsmanship, the weaker, at Leonard's, was the legitimate prey of the stronger. Leonard, beaten by a boy in a play of wits, or in an argument for justice, would assert the righteousness of his cause by physical violence. These spectacles were ugly and revolting: Eugene watched them with sick fascination.

Leonard himself was not a bad man—he was a man of considerable character, kindliness, and honest determination. He loved his family, he stood up with some courage against the bigotry in the Methodist church, where he was a deacon, and at length had to withdraw because of his remarks on Darwin's theory. He was, thus, an example of that sad liberalism of the village—an advanced thinker among the Methodists, a bearer of the torch at noon, an apologist for the toleration of ideas that have been established for fifty years. He tried faithfully to do his duties as a teacher. But he was of the earth—even his heavy-handed violence was of the earth, and had in it the unconscious brutality of nature. Although he asserted his interest in "the things of the mind," his interest in the soil was much greater, and he had added little to his stock of information since leaving college. He was slow-witted and quite lacking in the sensitive intuitions of Margaret, who loved the man with such passionate fidelity, however, that she seconded all his acts before the world. Eugene had even heard her cry out in a shrill, trembly voice against a student who had answered her husband insolently: "Why, I'd slap his head off! That's what I'd do!" And the boy had trembled, with fear and nausea, to see her so. But thus, he knew, could love change one. Leonard thought his actions wise and good: he had grown up in a tradition that demanded strict obedience to the master, and that would not brook opposition to his rulings. He had learned from his father, a Tennessee patriarch who ran a farm, preached on Sundays, and put down rebellion in his family with a horse-whip and pious prayers, the advantages of being God! He thought little boys who resisted him should be beaten.

Upon the sons of his wealthiest and most prominent clients, as well as upon his own children, Leonard was careful to inflict no chastisement, and these young men, arrogantly conscious of their immunity, were studious in their insolence and disobedience. The son of the Bishop, Justin Raper, a tall thin boy of thirteen, with black hair, a thin dark bumpy face, and absurdly petulant lips, typed copies of a dirty ballad and sold them among the students at five cents a copy.

"Madam, your daughter looks very fine,
Slapoon!
Madam, your daughter looks very fine,
Slapoon!"

Moreover, Leonard surprised this youth one afternoon in Spring, on the eastern flank of the hill, in the thick grass beneath a flowering dogwood, united in sexual congress with Miss Hazel Bradley, the daughter of a small grocer who lived below on Biltburn Avenue, and whose lewdness was already advertised in the town. Leonard, on second thought, did not go to the Bishop. He went to the Grocer.

"Well," said Mr. Bradley, brushing his long mustache reflectively away from his mouth, "you ought to put up a no-trespassin' sign."

The target of concentrated abuse, both for John Dorsey and the boys, was the son of a Jew. The boy's name was Edward Michalove. His father was a jeweller, a man with a dark, gentle floridity of manner and complexion. He had white delicate fingers. His counters were filled with old brooches, gemmed buckles, ancient incrusted watches. The boy had two sisters—large handsome women. His mother was dead. None of them looked Jewish: they all had a soft dark fluescence of appearance.

At twelve, he was a tall slender lad, with dark amber features, and the mincing effeminacy of an old maid. He was terrified in the company of other boys, all that was sharp, spinsterly, and venomous, would come protectively to the surface when he was ridiculed or threatened, and he would burst into shrill unpleasant laughter, or hysterical tears. His mincing walk, with the constant gesture of catching maidenly at the fringe of his coat as he walked along, his high husky voice, with a voluptuous and feminine current playing through it, drew upon him at once the terrible battery of their dislike.

They called him "Miss" Michalove; they badgered him into a state of constant hysteria, until he became an unpleasant snarling little cat, holding up his small clawed hands to scratch them with his long nails whenever they approached; they made him detestable, master and boys alike, and they hated him for what they made of him.

Sobbing one day when he had been kept in after school hours, he leaped up and rushed suddenly for the doors. Leonard, breathing stertorously, pounded awkwardly after him, and returned in a moment dragging the screaming boy along by the collar.

"Sit down!" yelled John Dorsey, hurling him into a desk. Then, his boiling fury unappeased, and baffled by fear of inflicting some crippling punishment on the boy, he added illogically: "Stand up!" and jerked him to his feet again.

"You young upstart!" he panted. "You little two-by-two whippersnapper! We'll just see, my sonny, if I'm to be dictated to by the like of you."

"Take your hands off me!" Edward screamed, in an agony of physical loathing. "I'll tell my father on you, old man Leonard, and he'll come down here and kick your big fat behind all over the lot. See if he don't."

Eugene closed his eyes, unable to witness the snuffing out of a young life. He was cold and sick about his heart. But when he opened his eyes again Edward, flushed and sobbing, was standing where he stood. Nothing had happened.

Eugene waited for God's visitation upon the unhappy blasphemer. He gathered, from the slightly open paralysis that had frozen John Dorsey's and Sister Amy's face, that they were waiting too.

Edward lived. There was nothing beyond this—nothing.

Eugene thought of this young Jew years later with the old piercing shame, with the riving pain by which a man recalls the irrevocable moment of some cowardly or dishonorable act. For not only did he join in the persecution of the boy—he was also glad at heart because of the existence of some one weaker than himself, some one at whom the flood of ridicule might be directed. Years later it came to him that on the narrow shoulders of that Jew lay a burden he might otherwise have borne, that that overladen heart was swollen with a misery that might have been his.

Mr. Leonard's "men of to-morrow" were doing nicely. The spirit of justice, of physical honor was almost unknown to them, but they were loud in proclaiming the letter. Each of them lived in a fear of discovery; each of them who was able built up his own defenses of swagger, pretense, and loud assertion—the great masculine flower of gentleness, courage, and honor died in a foul tangle. The great clan of go-getter was emergent in young boys—big in voice, violent in threat, withered and pale at heart—the "He-men" were on the rails.

And Eugene, encysted now completely behind the walls of his fantasy, hurled his physical body daily to defeat, imitated, as best he could, the speech, gesture, and bearing of his fellows, joined, by act or spirit, in the attack on those weaker than himself, and was compensated sometimes for his bruises when he heard Margaret say that he was "a boy with a fine spirit." She said it very often.

He was, fortunately, thanks to Gant and Eliza, a creature that was dominantly masculine in its sex, but in all his life, either at home or in school, he had seldom known victory. Fear he knew well. And so incessant, it seemed to him later, had been this tyranny of strength, that in his young wild twenties when his great boneframe was powerfully fleshed at last, and he heard about him the loud voices, the violent assertion, the empty threat memory would waken in him a maniacal anger, and he would hurl the insolent intruding swaggerer from his path, thrust back the jostler, glare insanely into fearful surprised faces and curse them.

He never forgot the Jew; he always thought of him with shame. But it was many years before he could understand that that sensitive and feminine person, bound to him by the secret and terrible bonds of his own dishonor, had in him nothing perverse, nothing unnatural, nothing degenerate. He was as much like a woman as a man. That was all. There is no place among the Boy Scouts for the androgyne—it must go to Parnassus.

XVIII

In the years that had followed Eliza's removal to Dixieland, by a slow inexorable chemistry of union and repellence, profound changes had occurred in the alignment of the Gants. Eugene had passed away from Helen's earlier guardianship into the keeping of Ben. This separation was inevitable. The great affection she had shown him when he was a young child was based not on any deep kinship of mind or body or spirit, but on her vast maternal feeling, something that poured from her in a cataract of tenderness and cruelty upon young, weak, plastic life.

The time had passed when she could tousle him on the bed in a smother of slaps and kisses, crushing him, stroking him, biting and kissing his young flesh. He was not so attractive physically—he had lost the round contours of infancy, he had grown up like a weed, his limbs were long and gangling, his feet large, his shoulders bony, and his head too big and heavy for the scrawny neck on which it sagged forward. Moreover, he sank deeper year by year into the secret life, a strange wild thing bloomed darkly in his face, and when she spoke to him his eyes were filled with the shadows of great ships and cities.

And this secret life, which she could never touch, and which she could never understand, choked her with fury. It was necessary for her to seize life in her big red-knuckled hands, to cuff and caress it, to fondle, love, and enslave it. Her boiling energy rushed outward on all things that lived in the touch of the sun. It was necessary for her to dominate and enslave, all her virtues—her strong lust to serve, to give, to nurse, to amuse—came from the imperative need for dominance over almost all she touched.

She was herself ungovernable; she disliked whatever did not yield to her governance. In his loneliness he would have yielded his spirit into bondage willingly if in exchange he might have had her love which so strangely he had forfeited, but he was unable to reveal to her the flowering ecstasies, the dark and incommunicable fantasies in which his life was bound. She hated secrecy; an air of mystery, a crafty but knowing reticence, or the unfathomable depths of other-worldliness goaded her to fury.

Convulsed by a momentary rush of hatred, she would caricature the pout of his lips, the droop of his head, his bounding kangaroo walk.

"You little freak. You nasty little freak. You don't even know who you are—you little bastard. You're not a Gant. Any one can see that. You haven't a drop of papa's blood in you. Queer one! Queer one! You're Greeley Pentland all over again."

She always returned to this—she was fanatically partisan, her hysterical superstition had already lined the family in embattled groups of those who were Gant and those who were Pentland. On the Pentland side, she placed Steve, Daisy, and Eugene—they were, she thought, the "cold and selfish ones," and the implication of the older sister and the younger brother with the criminal member of the family gave her an added pleasure. Her union with Luke was now inseparable. It had been inevitable. They were the Gants—those who were generous, fine, and honorable.

The love of Luke and Helen was epic. They found in each other the constant effervescence, the boundless extraversion, the richness, the loudness, the desperate need to give and to serve that was life to them. They exacerbated the nerves of each other, but their love was beyond grievance, and their songs of praise were extravagant.

"I'll criticise him if I like," she said pugnaciously. "I've got the right to. But I won't hear any one else criticise him. He's a fine generous boy—the finest one in this family. That's one thing sure."

Ben alone seemed to be without the grouping. He moved among them like a shadow—he was remote from their passionate fullblooded partisanship. But she thought of him as "generous"—he was, she concluded, a "Gant."

In spite of this violent dislike for the Pentlands, both Helen and Luke had inherited all Gant's social hypocrisy. They wanted above all else to put a good face on before the world, to be well liked and to have many friends. They were profuse in their thanks, extravagant in their praise, cloying in their flattery. They slathered it on. They kept their ill-temper, their nervousness, and their irritability for exhibition at home. And in the presence of any members of Jim or Will Pentland's family their manner was not only friendly, it was even touched slightly with servility. Money impressed them.

It was a period of incessant movement in the family. Steve had married a year or two before a woman from a small town in lower Indiana. She was thirty-seven years old, twelve years his senior, a squat heavy German with a big nose and a patient and ugly face. She had come to Dixieland one summer with another woman, a spinster of lifelong acquaintance, and allowed him to seduce her before she left. The winter following, her father, a small manufacturer of cigars, had died, leaving her $9,000 in insurance, his home, a small sum of money in the bank, and a quarter share in his business, which was left to the management of his two sons.

Early in Spring the woman, whose name was Margaret Lutz, returned to Dixieland. One drowsy afternoon Eugene found them at Gant's. The house was deserted save for them. They were sprawled out face downward, with their hands across each other's hips, on Gant's bed. They lay there silently, while he looked, in an ugly stupor. Steve's yellow odor filled the room. Eugene began to tremble with insane fury. The Spring was warm and lovely, the air brooded slightly in a flowering breeze, there was a smell of soft tar. He had come down to the empty house exultantly, tasting its delicious silence, the cool mustiness of indoors, and a solitary afternoon with great calf volumes. In a moment the world turned hag.

There was nothing that Steve touched that he did not taint. Eugene hated him because he stunk, because all that he touched stunk, because he brought fear, shame, and loathing wherever he went; because his kisses were fouler than his curses, his whines nastier than his threats. He saw the woman's hair blown gently by the blubbered exhalations of his brother's foul breath.

"What are you doing there on papa's bed?" he screamed.

Steve rose stupidly and seized him by the arm. The woman sat up, dopily staring, her short legs widened.

"I suppose you're going to be a little Tattle-tale," said Steve, bludgeoning him with heavy contempt. "You're going to run right up and tell mama, aren't you?" he said. He fastened his yellow fingers on Eugene's arm.

"Get off papa's bed," said Eugene desperately. He jerked his arm away.

"You're not going to tell on us, buddy, are you?" Steve wheedled, breathing pollution in his face.

He grew sick.

"Let me go," he muttered. "No."

Steve and Margaret were married soon after. With the old sense of physical shame Eugene watched them descend the stairs at Dixieland each morning for breakfast. Steve swaggered absurdly, smiled complacently, and hinted at great fortune about the town. There was rumor of a quarter-million.

"Put it there, Steve," said Harry Tugman, slapping him powerfully upon the shoulder. "By God, I always said you'd get there."

Eliza smiled at swagger and boast, her proud, pleased, tremulous sad smile. The first-born.

"Little Stevie doesn't have to worry any longer," said he. "He's on Easy Street. Where are all the Wise Guys now who said 'I told you so'? They're all mighty glad to give Little Stevie a Big Smile and the Glad Hand when he breezes down the street. Every Knocker is a Booster now all right, all right."

"I tell you what," said Eliza with proud smiles, "he's no fool. He's as bright as the next one when he wants to be." Brighter, she thought.

Steve bought new clothes, tan shoes, striped silk shirts, and a wide straw hat with a red, white and blue band. He swung his shoulders in a wide arc as he walked, snapped his fingers nonchalantly, and smiled with elaborate condescension on those who greeted him. Helen was vastly annoyed and amused; she had to laugh at his absurd strut, and she had a great rush of feeling for Margaret Lutz. She called her "honey," felt her eyes mist warmly with unaccountable tears as she looked into the patient, bewildered, and slightly frightened face of the German woman. She took her in her arms and fondled her.

"That's all right, honey," she said, "you let us know if he doesn't treat you right. We'll fix him."

"Steve's a good boy," said Margaret, "when he isn't drinking. I've nothing to say against him when he's sober." She burst into tears.

"That awful, that awful curse," said Eliza, shaking her head sadly, "the curse of licker. It's been responsible for the ruination of more homes than anything else."

"Well, she'll never win any beauty prizes, that's one thing sure," said Helen privately to Eliza.

"I'll vow!" said Eliza.

"What on earth did he mean by doing such a thing!" she continued. "She's ten years older than he if she's a day."

"I think he's done pretty well, if you ask me," said Helen, annoyed. "Good heavens, mama! You talk as if he's some sort of prize. Every one in town knows what Steve is." She laughed ironically and angrily. "No, indeed! He got the best of the bargain. Margaret's a decent girl."

"Well," said Eliza hopefully, "maybe he's going to brace up now and make a new start. He's promised that he'd try."

"Well, I should hope so," said Helen scathingly. "I should hope so. It's about time."

Her dislike for him was innate. She had placed him among the tribe of the Pentlands. But he was really more like Gant than any one else. He was like Gant in all his weakness, with none of his cleanliness, his lean fibre, his remorse. In her heart she knew this and it increased her dislike for him. She shared in the fierce antagonism Gant felt toward his son. But her feeling was broken, as was all her feeling, by moments of friendliness, charity, tolerance.

"What are you going to do, Steve?" she asked. "You've got a family now, you know."

"Little Stevie doesn't have to worry any longer," he said, smiling easily. "He lets the others do the worrying." He lifted his yellow fingers to his mouth, drawing deeply at a cigarette.

"Good heavens. Steve," she burst out angrily. "Pull yourself together and try to be a man for once. Margaret's a woman. You surely don't expect her to keep you up, do you?"

"What business is that of yours, for Christ's sake?" he said in a high ugly voice. "Nobody's asked your advice, have they? All of you are against me. None of you had a good word for me when I was down and out, and now it gets your goat to see me make good." He had believed for years that he was persecuted—his failure at home he attributed to the malice, envy, and disloyalty of his family, his failure abroad to the malice and envy of an opposing force that he called "the world."

"No," he said, taking another long puff at the moist cigarette, "don't worry about Stevie. He doesn't need anything from any of you, and you don't hear him asking for anything. You see that, don't you?" he said, pulling a roll of banknotes from his pocket and peeling off a few twenties. "Well, there's lots more where that came from. And I'll tell you something else: Little Stevie will be right up there among the Big Boys soon. He's got a couple of deals coming off that'll show the pikers in this town where to get off. You get that, don't you?" he said.

Ben, who had been sitting on the piano stool all this time, scowling savagely at the keys, and humming a little recurrent tune to himself while he picked it out with one finger, turned now to Helen, with a sharp flicker of his mouth, and jerked his head sideways.

"I hear Mr. Vanderbilt's getting jealous," he said.

Helen laughed ironically, huskily.

"You think you're a pretty wise guy, don't you?" said Steve heavily. "But I don't notice it's getting you anywhere."

Ben turned his scowling eyes upon him, and sniffed sharply, unconsciously.

"Now, I hope you're not going to forget your old friends, Mr. Rockefeller," he said in his subdued, caressing ominous voice. "I'd like to be vice-president if the job's still open." He turned back to the keyboard—and searched with a hooked finger.

"All right, all right," said Steve. "Go ahead and laugh, both of you, if you think it's funny. But you notice that Little Stevie isn't a fifteen-dollar clerk in a newspaper office, don't you? And he doesn't have to sing in moving-picture shows, either," he added.

Helen's bigboned face reddened angrily. She had begun to sing in public with the saddlemaker's daughter.

"You'd better not talk, Steve, until you get a job and quit bumming around," she said. "You're a fine one to talk, hanging around pool-rooms and drug-stores all day on your wife's money. Why, it's absurd!" she said furiously.

"Oh for God's sake!" Ben cried irritably, wheeling around. "What do you want to listen to him for? Can't you see he's crazy?"

As the summer lengthened, Steve began to drink heavily again. His decayed teeth, neglected for years, began to ache simultaneously: he was wild with pain and cheap whisky. He felt that Eliza and Margaret were in some way responsible for his woe—he sought them out day after day when they were alone, and screamed at them. He called them foul names and said they had poisoned his system.

In the early hours of morning, at two or three o'clock, he would waken, and walk through the house weeping and entreating release. Eliza would send him to Spaugh at the hotel or to McGuire, at his residence, in Eugene's charge. The doctors, surly and half-awake, peeled back his shirtsleeve and drove a needle loaded with morphine deep in his upper arm. After that, he found relief and sleep again.

One night, at the supper hour, he returned to Dixieland, holding his tortured jaws between his hands. He found Eliza bending over the spitting grease of the red-hot stove. He cursed her for bearing him, he cursed her for allowing him to have teeth, he cursed her for lack of sympathy, motherly love, human kindliness.

Her white face worked silently above the heat.

"Get out of here," she said. "You don't know what you're talking about. It's that accursed licker that makes you so mean." She began to weep, brushing at her broad red nose with her hand.

"I never thought I'd live to hear such talk from a son of mine," she said. She held out her forefinger with the old powerful gesture.

"Now, I want to tell you," she said, "I'm not going to put up with you any longer. If you don't get out of here at once I'm going to call 38 and let them take you." This was the police station. It awoke unpleasant memories. He had spent the day in jail on two similar occasions. He became more violent than before, screamed a vile name at her, and made a motion to strike her. At this moment, Luke entered; he was on his way to Gant's.

The antagonism between the boy and his older brother was deep and deadly. It had lasted for years. Now, trembling with anger, Luke came to his mother's defense.

"You m-m-m-miserable d-d-d-degenerate," he stuttered, unconsciously falling into the swing of the Gantian rhetoric. "You ought to b-b-b-be horsewhipped."

He was a well grown and muscular young fellow of nineteen years, but too sensitive to all the taboos of brotherhood to be prepared for the attack Steve made on him. Steve drove at him viciously, smashing drunkenly at his face with both hands. He was driven gasping and blinded across the kitchen.

Wrong forever on the throne.

Somewhere, through fear and fury, Eugene heard Ben's voice humming unconcernedly, and the slow picked tune on the piano.

"Ben!" he screamed, dancing about and grasping a hammer.

Ben entered like a cat. Luke was bleeding warmly from the nose.

"Come on, come on, you big bastard," said Steve, exalted by his success, throwing himself into a fancy boxing posture. "I'll take you on now. You haven't got a chance, Ben," he continued, with elaborate pity. "You haven't got a chance, boy. I'll tear your head off with what I know."

Ben scowled quietly at him for a moment while he pranced softly about, proposing his fists in Police Gazette attitudes. Then, exploding suddenly in maniacal anger, the quiet one sprang upon the amateur pugilist with one bound, and flattened him with a single blow of his fist. Steve's head bounced upon the floor in a most comforting fashion. Eugene gave a loud shriek of ecstasy and danced about, insane with joy, while Ben, making little snarling noises in his throat, leaped on his brother's prostrate body and thumped his bruised skull upon the boards. There was a beautiful thoroughness about his wakened anger—it never made inquiries till later.

"Good old Ben," screamed Eugene, howling with insane laughter. "Good old Ben."

Eliza, who had been calling out loudly for help, the police, and the interference of the general public, now succeeded, with Luke's assistance, in checking Ben's assault, and pulling him up from his dazed victim. She wept bitterly, her heart laden with pain and sadness, while Luke, forgetful of his bloody nose, sorrowful and full of shame only because brother had struck brother, assisted Steve to his feet and brushed him off.

A terrible shame started up in each of them—they were unable to meet one another's gaze. Ben's thin face was very white; he trembled violently and, catching sight of Steve's bleared eyes for a moment, he made a retching noise in his throat, went over to the sink, and drank a glass of cold water.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand," Eliza wept.

Helen came in from town with a bag of warm bread and cakes.

"What's the matter?" she said, noting at once all that had happened.

"I don't know," said Eliza, her face working, shaking her head for several moments before she spoke. "It seems that the judgment of God is against us. There's been nothing but misery all my life. All I want is a little peace." She wept softly, wiping her weak bleared eyes with the back of her hand.

"Well, forget about it," said Helen quietly. Her voice was casual, weary, sad. "How do you feel, Steve?" she asked.

"I wouldn't make any trouble for any one, Helen," he said, with a maudlin whimper. "No! No!" he continued in a brooding voice, "They've never given Steve a chance. They're all down on him. They jumped on me, Helen. My own brothers jumped on me, sick as I am, and beat me up. It's all right. I'm going away somewhere and try to forget. Stevie doesn't hold any grudge against any one. He's not built that way. Give me your hand, buddy," he said, turning to Ben with nauseous sentimentality and extending his yellow fingers, "I'm willing to shake your hand. You hit me to-night, but Steve's willing to forget."

"Oh my God," said Ben, grasping his stomach. He leaned weakly across the sink and drank another glass of water.

"No. No." Steve began again. "Stevie isn't built——"

He would have continued indefinitely in this strain, but Helen checked him with weary finality.

"Well, forget about it," she said, "all of you. Life's too short."

Life was. At these moments, after battle, after all the confusion, antagonism, and disorder of their lives had exploded in a moment of strife, they gained an hour of repose in which they saw themselves with sad tranquillity. They were like men who, driving forward desperately at some mirage, turn, for a moment, to see their footprints stretching interminably away across the waste land of the desert; or I should say, they were like those who have been mad, and who will be mad again, but who see themselves for a moment quietly, sanely, at morning, looking with sad untroubled eyes into a mirror.

Their faces were sad. There was great age in them. They felt suddenly the distance they had come and the amount they had lived. They had a moment of cohesion, a moment of tragic affection and union, which drew them together like small jets of flame against all the senseless nihilism of life.

Margaret came in fearfully. Her eyes were red, her broad German face white and tearful. A group of excited boarders whispered in the hall.

"I'll lose them all now," Eliza fretted. "The last time three left. Over twenty dollars a week and money so hard to get. I don't know what's to become of us all." She wept again.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," said Helen impatiently. "Forget about the boarders once in a while."

Steve sank stupidly into a chair by the long table. From time to time he muttered sentimentally to himself. Luke, his face sensitive, hurt, ashamed around his mouth, stood by him attentively, spoke gently to him, and brought him a glass of water.

"Give him a cup of coffee, mama," Helen cried irritably. "For heaven's sake, you might do a little for him."

"Why here, here," said Eliza, rushing awkwardly to the gas range and lighting a burner. "I never thought—I'll have some in a minute."

Margaret sat in a chair on the other side of the disorderly table, leaning her face in her hand and weeping. Her tears dredged little gulches through the thick compost of rouge and powder with which she coated her rough skin.

"Cheer up, honey," said Helen, beginning to laugh. "Christmas is coming." She patted the broad German back comfortingly.

Ben opened the torn screen door and stepped out on the back porch. It was a cool night in the rich month of August; the sky was deeply pricked with great stars. He lighted a cigarette, holding the match with white trembling fingers. There were faint sounds from summer porches, the laughter of women, a distant throb of music at a dance. Eugene went and stood beside him: he looked up at him with wonder, exultancy, and with sadness. He prodded him half with fear, half with joy.

Ben snarled softly at him, made a sudden motion to strike him, but stopped. A swift light flickered across his mouth. He smoked.

Steve went away with the German woman to Indiana, where, at first, came news of opulence, fatness, ease, and furs (with photographs), later of brawls with her honest brothers, and talk of divorce, reunion, and renascence. He gravitated between the two poles of his support, Margaret and Eliza, returning to Altamont every summer for a period of drugs and drunkenness that ended in a family fight, jail, and a hospital cure.

"Hell commences," howled Gant, "as soon as he comes home. He's a curse and a care, the lowest of the low, the vilest of the vile. Woman, you have given birth to a monster who will not rest until he has done me to death, fearful, cruel, and accursed reprobate that he is!"

But Eliza wrote her oldest son regularly, enclosed sums of money from time to time, and revived her hopes incessantly, against nature, against reason, against the structure of life. She did not dare to come openly to his defense, to reveal frankly the place he held in her heart's core, but she would produce each letter in which he spoke boastfully of his successes, or announced his monthly resurrection, and read them to an unmoved family.

They were florid, foolish letters, full of quotation marks and written in a large fancy hand. She was proud and pleased at all their extravagances; his flowery illiteracy was another proof to her of his superior intelligence.

Dear Mama:

Yours of the 11th to hand and must say I was glad to know you were in "the land of the living" again as I had begun to feel it was a "long time between drinks" since your last. ("I tell you what," said Eliza, looking up and sniggering with pleasure, "he's no fool." Helen, with a smile that was half ribald, half annoyed, about her big mouth, made a face at Luke, and lifted her eyes patiently upward to God as Eliza continued. Gant leaned forward tensely with his head craned upward, listening carefully with a faint grin of pleasure.) Well, mama, since I last wrote you things have been coming my way and it now looks as if the "Prodigal Son" will come home some day in his own private car. ("Hey, what's that?" said Gant, and she read it again for him. He wet his thumb and looked about with a pleased grin. "Wh-wh-what's the matter?" asked Luke. "Has he b-b-bought the railroad?" Helen laughed hoarsely. "I'm from Missouri," she said.) It took me a long time to get started, mama, but things were breaking against me and all that little Stevie has ever asked from any one in this "vale of tears" is a fair chance. (Helen laughed her ironical husky falsetto. "All that Little S-S-Stevie has ever asked," said Luke, reddening with annoyance, "is the whole g-g-g-goddam world with a few gold mines thrown in.") But now that I'm on my feet at last, mama, I'm going to show the world that I haven't forgotten those who stood by me in my "hour of need," and that the best friend a man ever had is his mother. ("Where's the shovel?" said Ben, snickering quietly.)

"That boy writes a good letter," said Gant appreciatively. "I'm damned if he's not the smartest one of the lot when he wants to be."

"Yes," said Luke angrily, "he's so smart that you'll b-b-believe any fairy tale he wants to tell you. B-b-b-but the one who's stuck by you through thick and thin gets no c-c-credit at all." He glanced meaningly at Helen. "It's a d-d-dam shame."

"Forget about it," she said wearily.

"Well," said Eliza thoughtfully, holding the letter in her folded hands and gazing away, "perhaps he's going to turn over a new leaf now. You never know." Lost in pleased revery she looked into vacancy, pursing her lips.

"I hope so!" said Helen wearily. "You've got to show me."

Privately: "You see how it is, don't you?" she said to Luke, mounting to hysteria. "Do I get any credit? Do I? I can work my fingers to the bone for them, but do I get so much as Go to Hell for my trouble? Do I?"

In these years Helen went off into the South with Pearl Hines, the saddlemaker's daughter. They sang together at moving-picture theatres in country towns. They were booked from a theatrical office in Atlanta.

Pearl Hines was a heavily built girl with a meaty face and negroid lips. She was jolly and vital. She sang ragtime and nigger songs with a natural passion, swinging her hips and shaking her breasts erotically.

"Here comes my da-dad-dy now
O pop, O pop, O-o pop."

They earned as much as $100 a week sometimes. They played in towns like Waycross, Georgia; Greenville, South Carolina; Hattiesburg, Mississippi, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

They brought with them the great armor of innocency. They were eager and decent girls. Occasionally the village men made cautious explorative insults, relying on the superstition that lives in small towns concerning "show girls." But generally they were well treated.

For them, these ventures into new lands were eager with promise. The vacant idiot laughter, the ribald enthusiasm with which South Carolina or Georgia countrymen, filling a theatre with the strong smell of clay and sweat, greeted Pearl's songs, left them unwounded, pleased, eager. They were excited to know that they were members of the profession; they bought *Variety* regularly, they saw themselves finally a celebrated high-salaried team on "big time" in great cities. Pearl was to "put over" the popular songs, to introduce the rag melodies with the vital rhythm of her dynamic meatiness, Helen was to give operatic dignity to the programme. In a respectful hush, bathed in a pink spot, she sang ditties of higher quality—Tosti's "Goodbye," "The End of a Perfect Day," and "The Rosary." She had a big, full, somewhat metallic voice: she had received training from her Aunt Louise, the splendid blonde who had lived in Altamont for several years after her separation from Elmer Pentland. Louise gave music lessons and enjoyed her waning youth with handsome young men. She was one of the ripe, rich, dangerous women that Helen liked. She had a little girl and went away to New York with the child when tongues grew fanged.

But she said: "Helen, that voice ought to be trained for grand opera."

Helen had not forgotten. She fantasied of France and Italy: the big crude glare of what she called "a career in opera," the florid music, the tiered galleries winking with gems, the torrential applause directed toward the full-blooded, dominant all-shadowing songsters struck up great anthems in her. It was a scene, she thought, in which she was meant to shine. And as the team of Gant and Hines (The Dixie Melody Twins) moved on their jagged circuit through the South, this desire, bright, fierce, and formless, seemed, in some way, to be nearer realization.

She wrote home frequently, usually to Gant. Her letters beat like great pulses; they were filled with the excitement of new cities, presentiments of abundant life. In every town they met "lovely people"—everywhere, in fact, good wives and mothers, and nice young men, were attracted hospitably to these two decent, happy, exciting girls. There was a vast decency, an enormous clean vitality about Helen that subjugated good people and defeated bad ones. She held under her dominion a score of young men—masculine, red-faced, hard-drinking and shy. Her relation to them was maternal and magistral, they came to listen and to be ruled; they adored her, but few of them tried to kiss her.

Eugene was puzzled and frightened by these lamb-like lions. Among men, they were fierce, bold, and combative; with her, awkward and timorous. One of them, a city surveyor, lean, highboned, alcoholic, was constantly involved in police-court brawls; another, a railroad detective, a large fair young man, split the skulls of negroes when he was drunk, shot several men, and was himself finally killed in a Tennessee gun-fight.

She never lacked for friends and protectors wherever she went. Occasionally, Pearl's happy and vital sensuality, the innocent gusto with which she implored

"Some sweet old daddy
Come make a fuss over me."

drew on village rakedom to false conjectures. Unpleasant men with wet cigars would ask them to have a convivial drink of corn whisky, call them "girley," and suggest a hotel room or a motor-car as a meeting-place. When this happened, Pearl was stricken into silence; helpless and abashed, she appealed to Helen.

And she, her large loose mouth tense and wounded at the corners, her eyes a little brighter, would answer:

"I don't know what you mean by that remark. I guess you've made a mistake about us." This did not fail to exact stammering apologies and excuses.

She was painfully innocent, temperamentally incapable of wholly believing the worst about any one. She lived in the excitement of rumor and suggestion: it never seemed to her actually possible that the fast young women who excited her had, in the phrase she used, "gone the limit." She was skilled in gossip, and greedily attentive to it, but of the complex nastiness of village life she had little actual knowledge. Thus, with Pearl Hines, she walked confidently and joyously over volcanic crust, scenting only the odor of freedom, change, and adventure.

But this partnership came to an end. The intention of Pearl Hines' life was direct and certain. She wanted to get married; she had always wanted to get married before she was twenty-five. For Helen, the singing partnership, the exploration of new lands, had been a gesture toward freedom, an instinctive groping toward a centre of life and purpose to which she could fasten her energy, a blind hunger for variety, beauty, and independence. She did not know what she wanted to do with her life; it was probable that she would never control even partially her destiny: she would be controlled, when the time came, by the great necessity that lived in her. That necessity was to enslave and to serve.

For two or three years Helen and Pearl supported themselves by these tours, leaving Altamont during its dull winter lassitude, and returning to it in Spring, or in Summer, with money enough to suffice them until their next season.

Pearl juggled carefully with the proposals of several young men during this period. She had the warmest affection for a ball-player, the second baseman and manager of the Altamont team. He was a tough handsome young animal, forever hurling his glove down in a frenzy of despair during the course of a game, and rushing belligerently at the umpire. She liked his hard assurance, his rapid twang, his tanned lean body.

But she was in love with no one—she would never be—and caution told her that the life-risk on bush-league ball-players was very great. She married finally a young man from Jersey City, heavy of hand, hoof, and voice, who owned a young but flourishing truck and livery business.

Thus, the partnership of the Dixie Melody Twins was dissolved. Helen, left alone, turned away from the drear monotony of the small towns to the gaiety, the variety, and the slaking fulfilment of her desires, which she hoped somehow to find in the cities.

She missed Luke terribly. Without him she felt incomplete, unarmored. He had been enrolled in the Georgia School of Technology in Atlanta for two years. He was taking the course in electrical engineering, the whole direction of his life had been thus shaped by Gant's eulogies, years before, of the young electrical expert, Liddell. He was failing in his work—his mind had never been forced to the discipline of study. All purpose with him was broken by a thousand impulses: his brain stammered as did his tongue, and as he turned impatiently and irritably to the logarithm tables, he muttered the number of the page in idiot repetition, keeping up a constant wild vibration of his leg upon the ball of his foot.

His great commercial talent was salesmanship; he had superlatively that quality that American actors and men of business call "personality"—a wild energy, a Rabelaisian vulgarity, a sensory instinct for rapid and swingeing repartee, and a hypnotic power of speech, torrential, meaningless, mad, and evangelical. He could sell anything because, in the jargon of salesmen, he could sell himself; and there was a fortune in him in the fantastic elasticity of American business, the club of all the queer trades, of wild promotions, where, amok with zealot rage, he could have chanted the yokels into delirium, and cut the buttons from their coats, doing every one, everything, and finally himself. He was not an electrical engineer—he was electrical energy. He had no gift for study—he gathered his unriveted mind together and bridged with it desperately, but crumpled under the stress and strain of calculus and the mechanical sciences.

Enormous humor flowed from him like crude light. Men who had never known him seethed with strange internal laughter when they saw him, and roared helplessly when he began to speak. Yet, his physical beauty was astonishing. His head was like that of a wild angel—coils and whorls of living golden hair flashed from his head, his features were regular, generous, and masculine, illuminated by the strange inner smile of idiot ecstasy.

His broad mouth, even when stammering irritably or when nervousness clouded his face, was always cocked for laughter—unearthly, exultant, idiot laughter. There was in him demonic exuberance, a wild intelligence that did not come from the brain. Eager for praise, for public esteem, and expert in ingratiation, this demon possessed him utterly at the most unexpected moments, in the most decorous surroundings, when he was himself doing all in his power to preserve the good opinion in which he was held.

Thus, listening to an old lady of the church, who with all her power of persuasion and earnestness was unfolding the dogmas of Presbyterianism to him, he would lean forward in an attitude of exaggerated respectfulness and attention, one broad hand clinched about his knee, while he murmured gentle agreement to what she said:

"Yes? . . . Ye-e-es? . . . Ye-e-e-es? . . . Ye-e-es? . . . Is that right? . . . Ye-e-es?"

Suddenly the demonic force would burst in him. Insanely tickled at the cadences of his agreement, the earnest placidity and oblivion of the old woman, and the extravagant pretense of the whole situation, his face flooded with wild exultancy, he would croon in a fat luscious bawdily suggestive voice:

"Y-ah-s? . . . Y-a-h-s?—Y-ah-s? . . . Y-ah-s?"

And when at length too late she became aware of this drowning flood of demonic nonsense, and paused, turning an abrupt startled face to him, he would burst into a wild "Whah-whah-whah-whah" of laughter, beyond all reason, with strange throat noises, tickling her roughly in the ribs.

Often Eliza, in the midst of long, minutely replenished reminiscence, would grow conscious, while she was purse-lipped in revery, of this annihilating mockery, would slap at his hand angrily as he gooched her, and shake a pursed piqued face at him, saying, with a heavy scorn that set him off into fresh "whah-whahs": "I'll declare, boy! You act like a regular idiot," and then shaking her head sadly, with elaborate pity: "I'd be ash-a-a-med! A-sha-a-med."

His quality was extraordinary; he had something that was a great deal better than most intelligence; he saw the world in burlesque, and his occasional answer to its sham, hypocrisy, and intrigue was the idiot devastation of "whah-whah!" But he did not possess his demon; it possessed him from time to time. If it had possessed him wholly, constantly, his life would have prevailed with astonishing honesty and precision. But when he reflected, he was a child—with all the hypocrisy, sentimentality and dishonest pretense of a child.

His face was a church in which beauty and humor were married—the strange and the familiar were at one in him. Men, looking at Luke, felt a start of recognition as if they saw something of which they had never heard, but which they had known forever.

Once or twice, during the Winter and Spring, while she was touring with Pearl Hines, Helen got into Atlanta to see him. In Spring they attended the week of Grand Opera. He would find employment for one night as a spearman in *Aïda* and pass the doorman for the remainder of the week with the assurance that he was "a member of the company—Lukio Gantio."

His large feet spread tightly out in sandals; behind the shin-greaves his awkward calves were spined thickly with hair; a thick screw of hair writhed under the edge of his tin helmet, as he loafed in the wings, leaning comically on his spear, his face lit with exultancy.

Caruso, waiting his entrance, regarded him from time to time with a wide Wop smile.

"Wotta you call yourself, eh?" asked Caruso, approaching and looking him over.

"W-w-w-why," he said, "d-don't you know one of your s-s-s-soldiers when you see him?"

"You're one hell of a soldier," said Caruso.

"Whah-whah-whah!" Luke answered. With difficulty he restrained his prodding fingers.

In the summer now he returned to Altamont, finding employment with a firm of land-auctioneers, and assisting them at the sale of a tract or a parcel of lots. He moved about above the crowd in the bed of a wagon, exhorting them to bid, with his hand at the side of his mouth, in a harangue compounded of frenzy, passionate solicitation, and bawdry. The work intoxicated him. With wide grins of expectancy they crowded round the spokes. In a high throaty tenor he called to them:

"Step right up, gentlemen, lot number 17, in beautiful Homewood—we furnish the wood, you furnish the home. Now gentlemen, this handsome building-site has a depth of 179 feet, leaving plenty of room for garden and backhouse (grow your own corn cobs in beautiful Homewood) with a frontage of 114 feet on a magnificent new macadam road."

"Where is the road?" some one shouted.

"On the blueprint, of course, Colonel. You've got it all in black and white. Now, gentlemen, the opportunity of your lives is kicking you in the pants. Are you men of vision? Think what Ford, Edison, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Julius Cæsar would do. Obey that impulse. You can't lose. The town is coming this way. Listen carefully. Do you hear it? Swell. The new courthouse will be built on yonder hill, the undertaker and the village bakery will occupy handsome edifices of pressed brick just above you. Oyez, oyez, oyez. What am I offered? What am I offered? Own your own home in beautiful Homewood, within a cannonshot of all railway, automobile, and airplane connections. Running water abounds within a Washingtonian stone's throw and in all the pipes. Our caravans meet all trains. Gentlemen, here's your chance to make a fortune. The ground is rich in mineral resources—gold, silver, copper, iron, bituminous coal and oil, will be found in large quantities below the roots of all the trees."

"What about the bushes, Luke?" yelled Mr. Halloran, the dairy-lunch magnate.

"Down in the bushes, that is where she gushes," Luke answered amid general tumult. "All right, Major. You with the face. What am I offered? What am I offered?"

When there was no sale, he greeted incoming tourists at the station-curbing with eloquent invitations to Dixieland, rich, persuasive, dominant above all the soliciting babel of the car-drivers, negro hotel-porters, and boarding-house husbands.

"I'll give you a dollar apiece for every one you drum up," said Eliza.

"O that's all right." O modestly. Generously.

"He'd give you the shirt off his back," said Gant.

A fine boy. As she cooled from her labors in the summer night, he brought her little boxes of ice-cream from town.

He was a hustler: he sold patent washboards, trick potato-peelers, and powdered cockroach-poison from house to house. To the negroes he sold hair-oil guaranteed to straighten kinky hair, and religious lithographs, peopled with flying angels, white and black, and volant cherubs, black and white, sailing about the knees of an impartial and crucified Saviour, and subtitled "God Loves Them Both."

They sold like hot cakes.

Otherwise, he drove Gant's car—a 1913 five-passenger Ford, purchase of an inspired hour of madness, occupant now of half Gant's conversation, object of abuse, boast, and anathema. It was before every one owned a car. Gant was awed and terrified by his rash act, exalted at the splendor of his chariot, appalled at its expense. Each bill for gasoline, repairs, or equipment brought a howl of anguish from him; a puncture, a breakdown, a minor disorder caused him to circle about in maddened strides, cursing, praying, weeping.

"I've never had a moment's peace since I bought it," he howled. "Accursed and bloody monster that it is, it will not be content until it has sucked out my life-blood, sold the roof over my head, and sent me out to the pauper's grave to perish. Merciful God," he wept, "it's fearful, it's awful, it's cruel that I should be afflicted thus in my old age." Turning to his constrained and apologetic son abruptly, he said: "How much is the bill? Hey?" His eyes roved wildly in his head.

"D-d-d-don't get excited, papa," Luke answered soothingly, teetering from foot to foot, "it's only $8.92."

"Jesus God!" Gant screamed. "I'm ruined." Sobbing in loud burlesque sniffles, he began his caged pacing.

But it was pleasant at dusk or in the cool summer nights, with Eliza or one of his daughters beside him, and a fragrant weed between his pallid lips, to hinge his long body into the back seat, and ride out into the fragrant countryside, or through the long dark streets of town. At the approach of another car he cried out in loud alarm, by turns cursing and entreating his son to caution. Luke drove nervously, erratically, wildly—his stammering impatient hands and knees communicated their uneven fidget to the flivver. He cursed irritably, plunged in exacerbated fury at the brake, and burst out in an annoyed "tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh," when the car stalled.

As the hour grew late, and the streets silent, his madness swelled in him. Lipping the rim of a long hill street, tree-arched and leafy and shelving in even terraces, he would burst suddenly into insane laughter, bend over the wheel, and pull the throttle open, his idiot "whah-whahs" filling the darkness as

Gant screamed curses at him. Down through the night they tore at murderous speed, the boy laughing at curse and prayer alike as they shot past the blind menace of street-crossings.

"You Goddamned scoundrel!" Gant yelled. "Stop, you mountain grill, or I'll put you in jail."

"Whah-whah."—His laughter soared to a crazy falsetto.

Daisy, arrived for a few weeks of summer coolness, quite blue with terror, would clutch the most recent of her annual arrivals to her breast, melodramatically, and moan:

"I beg of you, for the sake of my family, for the sake of my innocent motherless babes——"

"Whah-whah-whah!"

"He's a fiend out of hell," cried Gant, beginning to weep. "Cruel and criminal monster that he is, he will batter our brains out against a tree, before he's done." They whizzed with a perilous swerve by a car that, with a startled screech of its brakes, balked at the corner like a frightened horse.

"You damned thug!" Gant roared, plunging forward and fastening his great hands around Luke's throat. "Will you stop?"

Luke added another notch of blazing speed. Gant fell backward with a howl of terror.

On Sunday they made long tours into the country. Often they drove to Reynoldsville, twenty-two miles away. It was an ugly little resort, noisy with arriving and departing cars, with a warm stench of oil and gasoline heavy above its broad main street. But people were coming and going from several States: Southward they came up from South Carolina and Georgia, cotton-farmers, small tradesmen and their families in battered cars coated with red sandclay dust. They had a heavy afternoon dinner of fried chicken, corn, string-beans, and sliced tomatoes, at one of the big wooden boarding-house hotels, spent another hour in a drugstore over a chocolate nut-sundae, watched the summer crowd of fortunate tourists and ripe cool-skinned virgins flow by upon the wide sidewalk in thick pullulation, and returned again, after a brief tour of the town, on the winding immediate drop to the hot South. New lands.

Fluescent with smooth ripe curves, the drawling virgins of the South filled summer porches.

Luke was a darling. He was a dear, a fine boy, a big-hearted generous fellow, and just the cutest thing. Women liked him, laughed at him, pulled fondly the thick golden curls of his hair. He was sentimentally tender to children—girls of fourteen years. He had a grand romantic feeling for Delia Selborne, the oldest daughter of Mrs. Selborne. He bought her presents, was tender and irritable by turns. Once, at Gant's, on the porch under an August moon and the smell of ripening grapes, he caressed her while Helen sang in the parlor. He caressed her gently, leaned his head over her, and said he would like to lay it on her b-b-b-b-breast. Eugene watched them bitterly, with an inch of poison round his heart. He wanted the girl for himself: she was stupid, but she had the wise body and faint hovering smile of her mother. He wanted Mrs. Selborne more, he fantasied passionately about her yet, but her image lived again in Delia. As a result, he was proud, cold, scornful and foolish before them. They disliked him.

Enviously, with gnawn heart, he observed Luke's ministrations to Mrs. Selborne. His service was so devout, so extravagant that even Helen grew annoyed and occasionally jealous. And nightly, from a remote corner at Gant's or Eliza's, or from a parked automobile before the house, he heard her rich welling laughter, full of tenderness, surrender, and mystery. Sometimes, waiting in pitch darkness on the stairs at Eliza's, at one or two o'clock in the morning, he felt her pass him. As she touched him in the dark, she gave a low cry of terror; with an uncivil grunt he reassured her, and descended to bed with a pounding heart and a burning face.

Ah, yes, he thought, with green morality, observing his brother throned in laughter and affection, you Big Fool, you—you're just a sucker! You show off and act big, my sonny, and spend your money bringing ice-cream for them—but what do you get out of it? How do you feel when she gets out of an automobile at two o'clock in the morning after grunting in the dark with some damned travelling-man, or with old Poxy Logan who's been keeping a nigger woman up for years. "May I p-p-p-put my head on your breast?" You make me sick, you damned fool. *She's* no better, only you don't know beans. She'll let you spend all your money on her and then she'll run off with some little pimp in an automobile for the rest of the night. Yes, that's so. Do you want to make anything out of it? You big bluff. Come out into the back yard. . . . I'll show you . . . take that . . . and that . . . and that. . . .

Pumping his fists wildly, he fought his phantom into defeat and himself into exhaustion.

Luke had several hundred dollars saved from *The Saturday Evening Post* days, when he went off to school. He accepted very little money from Gant. He waited on tables, he solicited for college boarding-houses, he was the agent for a tailor who made Kippy Kampus Klothes. Gant boasted of these efforts. The town shifted its quid, nodded pertly, and spat, saying:

"That boy'll make his mark."

Luke worked as hard for an education as any other self-made man. He made every sacrifice. He did everything but study.

He was an immense popular success, so very extra, so very Luky. The school sought and adored him. Twice, after football games, he mounted a hearse and made funeral orations over the University of Georgia.

But, in spite of all his effort, toward the end of his third year he was still a sophomore, with every prospect of remaining one. One day in Spring he wrote the following letter to Gant:

"The b-b-b-bastards who r-r-run this place have it in for me. I've been c-c-c-crooked good and proper. They take your hard-earned m-m-money here and skin you. I'm g-g-g-going to a real school."

He went to Pittsburgh and found work with the Westinghouse Electric Company. Three times a week at night he attended courses at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. He made friends.

The war had come. After fifteen months in Pittsburgh he moved on to Dayton where he got employment at a boiler factory engaged in the fabrication of war materials.

From time to time, in summer for a few weeks, at Christmas for a few days, he returned to celebrate his holidays with his family. Always he brought Gant a suitcase stocked with beer and whisky. That boy was "good to his father."

XIX

One afternoon in the young summer, Gant leaned upon the rail, talking to Jannadeau. He was getting on to sixty-five, his erect body had settled, he stooped a little. He spoke of old age often, and he wept in his tirades now because of his stiffened hand. Soaked in pity, he referred to himself as "the poor old cripple who has to provide for them all."

The indolence of age and disintegration was creeping over him. He now rose a full hour later, he came to his shop punctually, but he spent long hours of the day extended on the worn leather couch of his office, or in gossip with Jannadeau, bawdy old Liddell, Cardiac, and Fagg Sluder, who had salted away his fortune in two big buildings on the Square and was at the present moment tilted comfortably in a chair before the fire department, gossiping eagerly with members of the ball club, whose chief support he was. It was after five o'clock, the game was over.

Negro laborers, grisly with a white coating of cement, sloped down past the shop on their way home. The draymen dispersed slowly, a slouchy policeman loafed down the steps of the city hall picking his teeth, and on the market side, from high grilled windows, there came the occasional howls of a drunken negress. Life buzzed slowly like a fly.

The sun had reddened slightly, there was a cool flowing breath from the hills, a freshening relaxation over the tired earth, the hope, the ecstasy of evening in the air. In slow pulses the thick plume of fountain rose, fell upon itself, and slapped the pool in lazy rhythms. A wagon rattled leanly over the big cobbles; beyond the firemen, the grocer Bradly wound up his awning with slow creaking revolutions.

Across the Square, at its other edge, the young virgins of the eastern part of town walked lightly home in chattering groups. They came to town at four o'clock in the afternoon, walked up and down the little avenue several times, entered a shop to purchase small justifications, and finally went into the chief drug-store, where the bucks of the town loafed and drawled in lazy alert groups. It was their club, their brasserie, the forum of the sexes. With confident smiles the young men detached themselves from their group and strolled back to booth and table.

"Hey theah! Wheahd you come from?"

"Move ovah theah, lady. I want to tawk to you."

Eyes as blue as Southern skies looked roguishly up to laughing gray ones, the winsome dimples deepened, and the sweetest little tail in dear old Dixie slid gently over on the polished board.

Gant spent delightful hours now in the gossip of dirty old men—their huddled bawdry exploded in cracked high wheezes on the Square. He came home at evening stored with gutter tidings, wetting his thumb and smiling slyly as he questioned Helen hopefully:

"She's no better than a regular little chippie--eh?"

"Ha-ha-ha-ha," she laughed mockingly. "Don't you wish you knew?"

His age bore certain fruits, emoluments of service. When she came home in the evening with one of her friends, she presented the girl with jocose eagerness to his embrace. And, crying out paternally, "Why, bless her heart! Come kiss the old man," he planted bristling mustache kisses on their white throats, their soft lips, grasping the firm meat of one arm tenderly with his good hand and cradling them gently. They shrieked with throaty giggle-twiddles of pleasure because it tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh-*tickled* so.

"Ooh! Mr. Gant! Whah-whah-whah!"

"Your father's such a nice man," they said. "Such lovely manners."

Helen's eyes fed fiercely on them. She laughed with husky-harsh excitement.

"Hah-ha-ha! He likes that, doesn't he? It's too bad, old boy, isn't it? No more monkey business."

He talked with Jannadeau, while his fugitive eyes roved over the east end of the Square. Before the shop the comely matrons of the town came up from the market. From time to time they smiled, seeing him, and he bowed sweepingly. Such lovely manners.

"The King of England," he observed, "is only a figurehead. He doesn't begin to have the power of the President of the United States."

"His power is severely li*mit*ed," said Jannadeau gutturally, "by custom but not by statute. In actua*lity* he is still one of the most powerful monarchs in the world." His thick black fingers probed carefully into the viscera of a watch.

"The late King Edward for all his faults," said Gant, wetting his thumb, "was a smart man. This fellow they've got now is a nonentity and a nincompoop." He grinned faintly, craftily, with pleasure at the big words, glancing slily at the Swiss to see if they had told.

His uneasy eyes followed carefully the stylish carriage of "Queen" Elizabeth's well clad figure as she went down by the shop. She smiled pleasantly, and for a moment turned her candid stare upon smooth marble slabs of death, carved lambs and cherubim. Gant bowed elaborately.

"Good-evening, madam," he said.

She disappeared. In a moment she came back decisively and mounted the broad steps. He watched her approach with quickened pulses. Twelve years.

"How's the madam?" he said gallantly. "Elizabeth, I was just telling Jannadeau you were the most stylish woman in town."

"Well, that's mighty sweet of you, Mr. Gant," she said in her cool poised voice. "You've always got a good word for every one."

She gave a bright pleasant nod to Jannadeau, who swung his huge scowling head ponderously around and muttered at her.

"Why, Elizabeth," said Gant, "you haven't changed an inch in fifteen years. I don't believe you're a day older."

She was thirty-eight and pleasantly aware of it.

"Oh, yes," she said laughing. "You're only saying that to make me feel good. I'm no chicken any more."

She had a pale clear skin, pleasantly freckled, carrot-colored hair, and a thin mouth live with humor. Her figure was trim and strong—no longer young. She had a great deal of energy, distinction, and elegance in her manner.

"How are all the girls, Elizabeth?" he asked kindly.

Her face grew sad. She began to pull her gloves off.

"That's what I came in to see you about," she said. "I lost one of them last week."

"Yes," said Gant gravely, "I was sorry to hear of that."

"She was the best girl I had," said Elizabeth. "I'd have done anything in the world for her. We did everything we could," she added. "I've no regrets on that score. I had a doctor and two trained nurses by her all the time."

She opened her black leather handbag, thrust her gloves into it, and pulling out a small bluebordered handkerchief, began to weep quietly.

"Huh-huh-huh-huh-huh," said Gant, shaking his head. "Too bad, too bad, too bad. Come back to my office," he said. They went back and sat down. Elizabeth dried her eyes.

"What was her name?" he asked.

"We called her Lily—her full name was Lillian Reed."

"Why, I knew that girl," he exclaimed. "I spoke to her not over two weeks ago."

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "she went like that—one hemorrhage right after another, down here." She tapped her abdomen. "Nobody ever knew she was sick until last Wednesday. Friday she was gone." She wept again.

"T-t-t-t-t-t," he clucked regretfully. "Too bad, too bad. She was pretty as a picture."

"I couldn't have loved her more, Mr. Gant," said Elizabeth, "if she had been my own daughter."

"How old was she?" he asked.

"Twenty-two," said Elizabeth, beginning to weep again.

"What a pity! What a pity!" he agreed. "Did she have any people?"

"No one who would do anything for her," Elizabeth said. "Her mother died when she was thirteen—she was born out here on the Beetree Fork—and her father," she added indignantly, "is a mean old bastard who's never done anything for her or any one else. He didn't even come to her funeral."

"He will be punished," said Gant darkly.

"As sure as there's a God in heaven," Elizabeth agreed, "he'll get what's coming to him in hell. The old bastard!" she continued virtuously, "I hope he rots!"

"You can depend upon it," he said grimly. "He will. Ah, Lord." He was silent a moment while he shook his head with slow regret.

"A pity, a pity," he muttered. "So young." He had the moment of triumph all men have when they hear some one has died. A moment, too, of grisly fear. Sixty-four.

"I couldn't have loved her more," said Elizabeth, "if she'd been one of my own. A young girl like that, with all her life before her."

"It's pretty sad when you come to think of it," he said. "By God, it is."

"And she was such a fine girl, Mr. Gant," said Elizabeth, weeping softly. "She had such a bright future before her. She had more opportunities than I ever had, and I suppose you know"—she spoke modestly—"what I've done."

"Why," he exclaimed, startled, "you're a rich woman, Elizabeth—damned if I don't believe you are. You own property all over town."

"I wouldn't say that," she answered, "but I've got enough to live on without ever doing another lick of work. I've had to work hard all my life. From now on I don't intend to turn my hand over."

She regarded him with a shy pleased smile, and touched a coil of her fine hair with a small competent hand. He looked at her attentively, noting with pleasure her firm uncorseted hips, moulded compactly into her tailored suit, and her cocked comely legs tapering to graceful feet, shod in neat little slippers of tan. She was firm, strong, washed, and elegant—a faint scent of lilac hovered over her: he looked at her candid eyes, lucently gray, and saw that she was quite a great lady.

"By God, Elizabeth," he said, "you're a fine-looking woman."

"I've had a good life," she said. "I've taken care of myself."

They had always known each other—since first they met. They had no excuses, no questions, no replies. The world fell away from them. In the silence they heard the pulsing slap of the fountain, the high laughter of bawdry in the Square. He took a book of models from the desk, and began to turn its slick pages. They showed modest blocks of Georgia marble and Vermont granite.

"I don't want any of those," she said impatiently. "I've already made up my mind. I know what I want."

He looked up surprised. "What is it?"

"I want the angel out front."

His face was shocked and unwilling. He gnawed the corner of his thin lip. No one knew how fond he was of the angel. Publicly he called it his White Elephant. He cursed it and said he had been a fool to order it. For six years it had stood on the porch, weathering, in all the wind and the rain. It was now brown and fly-specked. But it had come from Carrara in Italy, and it held a stone lily delicately in one hand. The other hand was lifted in benediction, it was poised clumsily upon the ball of one phthisic foot, and its stupid white face wore a smile of soft stone idiocy.

In his rages, Gant sometimes directed vast climaxes of abuse at the angel. "Fiend out of Hell!" he roared. "You have impoverished me, you have ruined me, you have cursed my declining years, and now you will crush me to death, fearful, awful, and unnatural monster that you are."

But sometimes when he was drunk he fell weeping on his knees before it, called it Cynthia, and entreated its love, forgiveness, and blessing for its sinful but repentant boy. There was laughter from the Square.

"What's the matter?" said Elizabeth. "Don't you want to sell it?"

"It will cost you a good deal, Elizabeth," he said evasively.

"I don't care," she answered, positively. "I've got the money. How much do you want?"

He was silent, thinking for a moment of the place where the angel stood. He knew he had nothing to cover or obliterate that place—it left a barren crater in his heart.

"All right," he said. "You can have it for what I paid for it—$420."

She took a thick sheaf of banknotes from her purse and counted the money out for him. He pushed it back.

"No. Pay me when the job's finished and it has been set up. You want some sort of inscription, don't you?"

"Yes. There's her full name, age, place of birth, and so on," she said, giving him a scrawled envelope. "I want some poetry, too—something that suits a young girl taken off like this."

He pulled his tattered little book of inscriptions from a pigeonhole, and thumbed its pages, reading her a quatrain here and there. To each she shook her head. Finally, he said:

"How's this one, Elizabeth?" He read:

> She went away in beauty's flower,
> Before her youth was spent;
> Ere life and love had lived their hour
> God called her, and she went.
>
> Yet whispers Faith upon the wind:
> No grief to her was given.
> She left *your* love and went to find
> A greater one in heaven.

"Oh, that's lovely—lovely," she said. "I want that one."

"Yes," he agreed, "I think that's the best one."

In the musty cool smell of his little office they got up. Her gallant figure reached his shoulder. She buttoned her kid gloves over the small pink haunch of her palms and glanced about her. His battered sofa filled one wall, the line of his long body was printed in the leather. She looked up at him. His face was sad and grave. They remembered.

"It's been a long time, Elizabeth," he said.

They walked slowly to the front through aisled marbles. Sentinelled just beyond the wooden doors, the angel leered vacantly down. Jannadeau drew his great head turtlewise a little further into the protective hunch of his burly shoulders. They went out on to the porch.

The moon stood already, like its own phantom, in the clear washed skies of evening. A little boy with an empty paper-delivery bag swung lithely by, his freckled nostrils dilating pleasantly with hunger and the fancied smell of supper. He passed, and for a moment, as they stood at the porch edge, all life seemed frozen in a picture: the firemen and Fagg Sluder had seen Gant, whispered, and were now looking toward him; a policeman, at the high side-porch of the Police Court, leaned on the rail and stared; at the near edge of the central grass-plot below the fountain, a farmer bent for water at a bubbling jet, rose dripping, and stared; from the Tax Collector's office, City Hall, upstairs, Yancey, huge, meaty, shirtsleeved, stared. And in that second the slow pulse of the fountain was suspended, life was held, like an arrested gesture, in photographic abeyance, and Gant felt himself alone move deathward in a world of seemings as, in 1910, a man might find himself again in a picture taken on the grounds of the Chicago Fair, when he was thirty and his mustache black, and, noting the bustled ladies and the derbied men fixed in the second's pullulation, remember the dead instant, seek beyond the borders for what was there (he knew); or as a veteran who finds himself upon his elbow near Ulysses Grant, before the march, in pictures of the Civil War, and sees a dead man on a horse; or I should say, like some completed Don, who finds himself again before a tent in Scotland in his youth, and notes a cricket-bat long lost and long forgotten, the face of a poet who has died, and young men and the tutor as they looked that Long Vacation when they read nine hours a day for "Greats."

Where now? Where after? Where then?

XX

GANT, during these years in which Helen and Luke, the two for whom he felt the deepest affection, were absent a large part of the time, lived a splintered existence at home and at Eliza's. He feared and hated a lonely life, but habit was deeply rooted in him, and he was unwilling to exchange the well-used comfort of his own home for the bald wintriness of Eliza's. She did not want him. She fed him willingly enough, but his tirades and his nightly sojourns, both longer and more frequent now that his daughter was absent, annoyed her more than they ever had before.

"You have a place of your own," she cried fretfully. "Why don't you stay in it? I don't want you around making trouble."

"Send him on," he moaned bitterly. "Send him on. Over the stones rattle his bones, he's only a beggar that nobody owns. Ah, Lord! The old drayhorse has had its day. Its race is run. Kick him out: the old cripple can no longer provide them with victuals, and they will throw him on the junkheap, unnatural and degenerate monsters that they are."

But he remained at Dixieland as long as there was any one to listen to him, and to the bleak little group of winter boarders he brought magic. They fed hungrily on all the dramatic gusto with which, lunging back and forth in a big rocker, before the blazing parlor fire, he told and retold the legends of his experience, taking, before their charmed eyes, an incident that had touched him romantically, and embellishing, weaving and building it up. A whole mythology grew up as, goggle-eyed, they listened:

General Fitzhugh Lee, who had reined up before the farmer boy and asked for a drink of water, now tossed off an oaken bucketful, questioned him closely concerning the best roads into Gettysburg, asked if he had seen detachments of the enemy, wrote his name down in a small book, and went off saying to his staff: "That boy will make his mark. It is impossible to defeat an enemy which breeds boys like that."

The Indians, whom he had passed amicably as he rode out into the New Mexican desert on a burro, seeking the ancient fort, now spurred after him with fell intent and wild scalping whoops. He rode furiously through muttering redskin villages, and found the protection of two cattlemen in the nick of time. The thief who had entered his room at dead of night in New Orleans, and picked up his clothes, and whom he had fought desperately upon the floor, he now pursued naked for seventeen blocks (not five) down Canal Street.

He went several times a week to the moving-picture shows, taking Eugene, and sitting, bent forward in hunched absorption, through two full performances. They came out at ten-thirty or eleven o'clock, on cold ringing pavements, into a world frozen bare—a dead city of closed shops, dressed windows, milliners' and clothiers' models posturing with waxen gaiety at congealed silence.

On the Square the slackened fountain dropped a fat spire of freezing water into its thickening rim of ice. In summer, a tall spire blown in blue sheets of spray. When they turned it down it wilted—that was like a fountain, too. No wind blew.

His eyes fixed on the clean concrete walk, Gant strode on, muttering dramatically, composing a narrative of the picture. The cold steel of new sewing-machines glinted in dim light. The Singer building. Tallest in the world. The stitching hum of Eliza's machine. Needle through your finger before you know it. He winced. They passed the Sluder Building at the corner of the Square and turned left. Gets over $700 a month in office-rent from this alone. The window on the corner was filled with rubber syringes and thermos bottles. Drink Coca Cola. They say he stole the formula from old mountain woman. $50,000,000 now. Rats in the vats. Dope at Wood's better. Too weak here. He had recently acquired a taste for the beverage and drank four or five glasses a day.

D. Stern had his old shack on that corner twenty years before Fagg bought it. Belonged to Paston estate. Could have bought it for song. Rich man now. D. moved to North Main now. The Jew's rich. Fortune out of winnies. They're hot, they're hot. In a broken pot. If I had a little time I'd make a little rhyme. Thirteen kids—she had one every year. As broad as she's long. They all get fat. Every one works. Sons pay father board. None of mine, I can assure you. The Jews get there.

The hunchback—what did they call him? One of Nature's Cruel Jests. Ah, Lord! What's become of old John Bunny? I used to like his pictures. Oh yes. Dead.

That pure look they have, at the end, when he kisses her, mused Eugene. Later—A Warmer Clime. Her long lashes curled down over her wet eyes, she was unable to meet his gaze. The sweet lips trembled with desire as, clasping her in a grip of steel, he bent down over her yielding body and planted hungry kisses on her mouth. When the purple canopy of dawn had been reft asunder by the rays of the invading sun. The Stranger. It wouldn't do to say the next morning. They have a thick coat of yellow paint all over their face. Meanwhile, in Old England. I wonder what they say to each other. They're a pretty tough lot, I suppose.

A swift thrust of conviction left him unperturbed. The other was better.

He thought of the Stranger. Steel-gray eyes. A steady face. An eighth of a second faster on the draw than any one else. Two-gun Bill Hart. Anderson of the Essanay. Strong quiet men.

He clapped his hand against his buttock with a sharp smack and shot the murderous forefinger at an ashcan, a lamp-post, and a barber-pole, with a snapping wrist. Gant, startled in composition, gave him a quick uneasy look. They walked on.

Came a day when Spring put forth her blossoms on the earth again. No, no—not that. Then all grew dark. Picture of a lily trampled on the earth. That means he bigged her. Art. Filled her with thee a baby fair. You can't go away now. Why? Because—because—her eyes dropped shyly, a slow flush mantled her cheek. He stared at her blankly for a moment, then his puzzled gaze—(O good!)—fell to the tiny object she was fingering nervously, with dawning comprehension. Blushing rosily, she tried to conceal the little jacket behind her. Grace! A great light broke on him! Do you mean it? She went to him with a cry, half laugh, half sob, and buried her burning face in his neck. You silly boy. Of course I mean it (you bastard!). The little dance girl. Smiling with wet lechery and manipulating his moist rope of cigar, Faro Jim shuffled a pack of cards slowly and fixed on her his vulturesque eye. A knife in his shiny boots, a small derringer and three aces up his ruffled sleeve, and suave murder in his heart. But the cold gray eyes of the Stranger missed nothing. Imperturbably he drank his Scotch, wheeled from the mirror with barking Colt just one-sixth of a second before the gambler could fire. Faro coughed and slid forward slowly upon the floor.

There was no sound now in the crowded room of the Triple Y. Men stood petrified. The face of Bad Bill and the two Mexicans had turned a dirty gray. Finally, the sheriff spoke, turning with awe from the still figure on the sawdust floor.

"By God, stranger!" he ejaculated. "I never knew the man lived who could beat Faro to the draw. What's yore name?"

"In the fam'ly Bible back home, pardner," the Stranger drawled, "it's Eugene Gant, but folks out here generally calls me The Dixie Ghost."

There was a slow gasp of wonder from the crowd.

"Gawd!" some one whispered. "It's the Ghost!"

As the Ghost turned coolly back to finish his interrupted drink, he found himself face to face with the little dancing girl. Two smoking globes of brine welled from the pellucid depths of her pure eyes and fell with a hot splash on his bronzed hand.

"How can I ever thank you!" she cried. "You have saved me from a fate far worse than death."

But the Ghost, who had faced death many times without a flicker of a lash, was unable to face something he saw now in a pair of big brown eyes. He took off his sombrero and twisted it shyly in his big hands.

"Why, that's all right, ma'am," he gulped awkwardly. "Glad to be of service to a lady any time."

By this time the two bartenders had thrown a table-cloth over Faro Bill, carried the limp body into the back room, and returned to their positions behind the bar. The crowd clustered about in little groups, laughing and talking excitedly, and in a moment, as the pianist began to hammer out a tune on the battered piano, broke into the measures of a waltz.

In the wild West of those days, passions were primitive, vengeance sudden, and retribution immediate.

Two dimples sentinelled a platoon of milk-white teeth.

"Won't you dance with me, Mr. Ghost?" she coaxed.

Thoughtfully he pondered on love's mystery. Pure but passionate. Appearances against her, 'tis true. The foul breath of slander. She worked in a bawdy-house but her heart was clean. Outside of that, what can one say against her? He thought pleasantly of murder. With child's eyes he regarded his extinct enemies. Men died violently but cleanly, in the movies. Bang-bang. Good-by, boys, I'm through. Through the head or heart —a clean hole, no blood. He had kept innocency. Do their guts or their brains come spilling out? Currant jelly where a face was, the chin shot off. Or down there that other— His arm beat the air like a wing: he writhed. If you lose that? Done, die. He clutched his throat in his anguish.

They bent down eastward along Academy Street, having turned right from the little caudal appendage that gave on the northeastern corner of the Square. The boy's mind flamed with bright streaming images, sharp as gems, mutable as chameleons. His life was the shadow of a shadow, a play within a play. He became the hero-actor-star, the lord of the cinema, and the lover of a beautiful movie-queen, as heroic as his postures, with a superior actuality for every make-believe. He was the Ghost and he who played the Ghost, the cause that minted legend into fact.

He was those heroes whom he admired, and the victor, in beauty, nobility, and sterling worth, over those whom he despised because they always triumphed and were forever good and pretty and beloved of women. He was chosen and beloved of a bevy of internationally renowned beauties, vampires and pure sweet girls alike, with fruity blondes in the lead, all contesting for his favors, and some of the least scrupulous resorting to underhand practices in order to win him. Their pure eyes turned up to him in everlasting close-ups: he feasted virtuously upon their proffered lips and, conflict over, murder sanctified, and virtue crowned, walked away with his siren into the convenient blaze of a constantly setting sun.

With burning sidelong face he looked quickly up at Gant. twisting his convulsive neck.

Across the street, a calcium glare from the corner light bathed coldly the new brick façade of the Orpheum Theatre. All This Week Gus Nolan and His Georgia Peaches. Also the Piedmont Comedy Four and Miss Bobbie Dukane.

The theatre was dark, the second show was over. They stared curiously across the street at the posters. In this cold silence where were the Peaches? At the Athens now, upon the Square. They always went there after. Gant looked at his watch. 11:12. Big Bill Messler outside swinging his club and watching them. On the counter stools a dozen bucks and ogling rakehells. I've got a car outside. Dalliance under difficulties. Later, the Genevieve on Liberty Street. They all stay there. Whisperings. Footfalls. Raided.

Girls from good families, some of them, I suppose, Gant thought.

Opposite the Baptist church a hearse was drawn up before Gorham's Undertaking Parlors. A light burned dimly through the ferns. Who can that be? he wondered. Miss Annie Patton critically ill. She's past eighty. Some lunger from New York. A little Jew with a peaked face. Some one all the time. Await alike th' inevitable hour. Ah, Lord!

With loss of hunger, he thought of undertaking and undertakers, and in particular of Mr. Gorham. He was a man with blond hair and white eyebrows.

Waited to marry her when that rich young Cuban died, so they could take honeymoon to Havana.

They turned down Spring Street by the Baptist Church. This is really like a city of the dead, Eugene thought. The town, rimed with frost, lay frozen below the stars in a cataleptic trance. The animacy of life hung in abeyance. Nothing grew old, nothing decayed, nothing died. It was a triumph over time. If a great demon snapped his fingers and stopped all life in the world for an instant that should be a hundred years, who would know the difference? Every man a Sleeping Beauty. If you're waking call me early, call me early, mother dear.

He tried to see life and movement behind the walls, and failed. He and Gant were all that lived. For a house betrays nothing: there may be murder behind its very quiet face. He thought that Troy should be like this—perfect, undecayed as the day when Hector died. Only they burned it. To find old cities as they were, unruined—the picture charmed him. The Lost Atlantis. Ville d'Ys. The old lost towns, seasunken. Great vacant ways, unrusted, echoed under his lonely feet; he haunted vast arcades, he pierced the atrium, his shoes rang on the temple flags.

Or to be, he lusciously meditated, left alone with a group of pretty women in a town whence all the other people had fled from some terror of plague, earthquake, volcano, or other menace to which he, quite happily, was immune. Lolling his tongue delicately, he saw himself loafing sybaritically through first-class confectioners' and grocers' shops, gorging like an anaconda on imported dainties: exquisite small fish from Russia, France, and Sardinia; coal-black hams from England; ripe olives, brandied peaches, and liqueur chocolates. He would loot old cellars for fat Burgundies, crack the gold necks of earth-chilled bottles of Pol Roger against the wall, and slake his noonday thirst at the spouting bung of a great butt of *Münchener dunkels.* When his linen was soiled he would outfit himself anew with silk underwear and the finest shirtings; he would have a new hat every day in the week and new suits whenever he pleased.

He would occupy a new house every day, and sleep in a different bed every night, selecting the most luxurious residence ultimately for permanent occupancy, and bringing together in it the richest treasures of every notable library in the city. Finally, when he wanted a woman from the small group that remained and that spent its time in weaving new enticements for him, he would summons her by ringing out the number he had given her on the Court House bell.

He wanted opulent solitude. His dark vision burned on kingdoms under the sea, on windy castle crags, and on the deep elf kingdoms at the earth's core. He groped for the doorless land of faery, that illimitable haunted country that opened somewhere below a leaf or a stone. And no birds sing.

More practically, he saw for himself great mansions in the ground, grottoes buried in the deep heart of a hill, vast chambers of brown earth, sumptuously appointed with his bee-like plunder. Cool hidden cisterns would bring him air; from a peephole in the hillside he could look down on a winding road and see armed men seeking for him, or hear their thwarted gropings overhead. He would pull fat fish from subterranean pools, his great earth cellars would be stocked with old wine, he could loot the world of its treasures, including the handsomest women, and never be caught.

King Solomon's mines. She. Prosperine. Ali Baba. Orpheus and Eurydice. Naked came I from my mother's womb. Naked shall I return. Let the mothering womb of earth engulf me. Naked, a valiant wisp of man, in vast brown limbs engulfed.

They neared the corner above Eliza's. For the first time the boy noted that their pace had quickened, and that he had almost broken into a trot in order to keep up with Gant's awkward plunging strides.

His father was moaning softly with long quivering exhalations of breath, and he had one hand clasped over his pain. The boy spluttered idiotically with laughter. Gant turned a glance full of reproach and physical torture upon him.

"Oh-h-h-h-h! Merciful God," he whined, "it's hurting me."

Abruptly, Eugene was touched with pity. For the first time he saw plainly that great Gant had grown old. The sallow face had yellowed and lost its sinew. The thin mouth was petulant. The chemistry of decay had left its mark.

No, there was no return after this. Eugene saw now that Gant was dying very slowly. The vast resiliency, the illimitable power of former times had vanished. The big frame was breaking up before him like a beached ship. Gant was sick. He was old.

He had a disease that is very common among old men who have lived carelessly and lustily—enlargement of the prostate gland. It was not often in itself a fatal disease—it was more often one of the flags of age and death, but it was ugly and uncomfortable. It was generally treated successfully by surgery—the operation was not desperate. But Gant hated and feared the knife: he listened eagerly to all persuasions against it.

He had no gift for philosophy. He could not view with amusement and detachment the death of the senses, the waning of desire, the waxing of physical impotence. He fed hungrily, lewdly, on all news of seduction: his amusement had in it the eyes of eagerness, the hot breath of desire. He was incapable of the pleasant irony by which the philosophic spirit mocks that folly it is no longer able to enjoy.

Gant was incapable of resignation. He had the most burning of all lusts—the lust of memory, the ravenous hunger of the will which tries to waken what is dead. He had reached the time of life when he read the papers greedily for news of death. As friends and acquaintances died he shook his head with the melancholy hypocrisy of old men, saying: "They're all going, one by one. Ah, Lord! The old man will be the next." But he did not believe it. Death was still for the others, not for himself.

He grew old very rapidly. He began to die before their eyes—a quick age, and a slow death, impotent, disintegrating, horrible because his life had been so much identified with physical excess—huge drinking, huge eating, huge rioting debauchery. It was fantastic and terrible to see the great body waste. They began to watch the progress of his disease with something of the horror with which one watches the movements of a dog with a broken leg, before he is destroyed—a horror greater than that one feels when a man has a similar hurt, because a man may live without legs. A dog is all included in his hide.

His wild bombast was tempered now by senile petulance. He cursed and whined by intervals. At the dead of night he would rise, full of pain and terror, blaspheming vilely against his God at one moment, and frantically entreating forgiveness at the next. Through all this tirade ran the high quivering exhalation of physical pain—actual and undeniable.

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h! I curse the day I was born! . . . I curse the day I was given life by that bloodthirsty Monster up above . . . Oh-h-h-h-h-h! Jesus! I beg of you. I know I've been bad. Forgive me. Have mercy and pity upon me! Give me another chance, in Jesus' name . . . Oh-h-h-h-h!"

Eugene had moments of furious anger because of these demonstrations. He was angry that Gant, having eaten his cake, now howled because he had stomach-ache and at the same time begged for more. Bitterly he reflected that his father's life had devoured whatever had served it, and that few men had had more sensuous enjoyment, or had been more ruthless in their demands on others. He found these exhibitions, these wild denunciations and cowardly grovellings in propitiation of a God none of them paid any attention to in health, ugly and abominable. The constant meditation of both Gant and Eliza on the death of others, their morbid raking of the news for items announcing the death of some person known to them, their weird absorption with the death of some toothless hag who, galled by bedsores, at length found release after her eightieth year, while fire, famine, and slaughter in other parts of the world passed unnoticed by them, their extravagant superstition over what was local and unimportant, seeing the intervention of God in the death of a peasant. and the suspension of divine law and natural order in their own, filled him with choking fury.

But Eliza was in splendid condition now to ponder upon the death of others. Her health was perfect. She was in her middle fifties: she had grown triumphantly stronger after the diseases of the middle years. White, compact, a great deal heavier now than she had ever been, she performed daily tasks of drudgery in the maintenance of Dixieland, that would have floored a strong negro. She hardly ever got to bed before two o'clock in the morning, and was up again before seven.

She admitted her health grudgingly. She made the most of every ache, and she infuriated Gant by meeting every complaint with a corresponding account of her own disorders. When badgered by Helen because of her supposed neglect of the sick man or when the concentration of attention upon the invalid piqued her jealousy, she smiled with white tremulous bitterness, hinting darkly:

"He may not be the first to go. I had a premonition—I don't know what else you'd call it—the other day. I tell you what—it may not be long now—" Her eyes bleared with pity—shaking her puckered mouth, she wept at her own funeral.

"Good heavens, mama!" Helen burst out furiously. "There's nothing wrong with you. Papa's a sick man! Don't you realize that?"

She didn't.

"Pshaw!" she said. "There's nothing much wrong with him. McGuire told me two men out of three have it after they're fifty."

His body as it sickened distilled a green bile of hatred against her crescent health. It made him mad to see her stand so strong. Murderous, impotent, baffled—a maniacal anger against her groped for an outlet in him, sometimes exploding in a wild inchoate scream.

He yielded weakly to invalidism, he became tyrannous of attention, jealous of service. Her indifference to his health maddened him, created a morbid hunger for pity and tears. At times he got insanely drunk and tried to frighten her by feigning death, one time so successfully that Ben, bending over his rigid form in the hallway, was whitened with conviction.

"I can't feel his heart, mama," he said, with a nervous whicker of his lips.

"Well," she said, picking her language with deliberate choosiness, "the pitcher went to the well once too often. I knew it would happen sooner or later."

Through a slotted eye he glared murderously at her. Judicially, with placid folded hands, she studied him. Her calm eye caught the slow movement of a stealthy inhalation.

"You get his purse, son, and any papers he may have," she directed. "I'll call the undertaker."

With an infuriate scream the dead awakened.

"I thought that would bring you to," she said complacently.

He scrambled to his feet.

"You hell-hound!" he yelled. "You would drink my heart's blood. You are without mercy and without pity—inhuman and bloody monster that you are."

"Some day," Eliza observed, "you'll cry wolf-wolf once too often."

He went three times a week to Cardiac's office for treatment. The dry doctor had grown old; behind his dusty restraint, the prim authority of his manner, there was a deepening well of senile bawdry. He had a comfortable fortune, he cared little for his dwindling practice. He was still a brilliant bacteriologist: he spent hours over slides etched in flowering patterns of bacilli, and he was sought after by diseased prostitutes, to whom he rendered competent service.

He dissuaded the Gants from surgery. He was jealously absorbed in the treatment of Gant's disease, scoffed at operations, and insisted he could give adequate relief by manipulation of the affected parts and the use of the catheter.

The two men became devoted friends. The doctor gave up entire mornings to the treatment of Gant's disease. The consulting-room was filled with their sly laughter while scrofulous mountaineers glared dully at the pages of *Life* in the antechamber. As Gant sprawled out voluptuously on the table after his masseur had finished his work, he listened appreciatively to the secrets of light women, or to tidbits from books of pseudo-scientific pornography, of which the doctor had a large number.

"You say," he demanded eagerly, "that the monks petitioned the archbishop?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "They suffered during the hot weather. He wrote 'granted' across the petition. Here's a photograph of the document." He held the book open in his clean parched fingers.

"Merciful God!" said Gant, staring. "I suppose it's pretty bad in those hot countries."

He licked his thumb, smiling lewdly to himself. The late Oscar Wilde, for instance.

XXI

During the first years of this illness Gant showed a diminished, but not a seriously impaired, energy. At first he had, under the doctor's treatment, periods of tranquillity when he almost believed himself well. There were also times when he became a whining dotard over night, lay indolently abed for days, and was flabbily acquiescent to his disorder. These climaxes usually came on the heels of a roaring spree. The saloons had been closed for years: the town had been one of the first to vote on "local option."

Gant had piously contributed his vote for purity. Eugene remembered the day, years before, when he went proudly with his father to the polls. The militant "drys" had agreed to advertise their vote by wearing a scrap of white silk in their lapels. That was for purity. The defiant wets wore "red."

Announced by violent trumpetings in the Protestant churches, the day of atonement dawned on a seasoned army of well drilled teetotalers. Those wets who had victoriously withstood the pressure of hearth and pulpit—their number (*aië, aië*) was small—went to their death with the gallant swagger, and with the gleam of purloined honor, of men who are to die fighting most desperately against the engulfing mob.

They did not know how gallant was their cause: they knew only that they had stood against the will of a priest-ridden community—the most annihilating force in the village. They had never been told they stood for liberty; they stood rubily, stubbornly, with the strong brown smell of shame in their nostrils, for the bloodshot, malt-mouthed, red-nosed, loose-pursed Demon Rum. So, they came down with vine leaves in their hair, and a good fog of rye upon their breaths, and with brave set smiles around their determined mouths.

As they approached the polls, glancing, like surrounded knights, for an embattled brother, the church women of the town, bent like huntresses above the straining leash, gave the word to the eager children of the Sunday schools. Dressed all in white, and clutching firmly in their small hands the tiny stems of American flags, the pigmies, monstrous as only children can be when they become the witless mouths of slogans and crusades, charged hungrily, uttering their shrill cries, upon their Gulliver.

"There he is, children. Go get him."

Swirling around the marked man in wild elves' dance, they sang with piping empty violence:

"We are some fond mother's treasure,
  Men and women of to-morrow,
For a moment's empty pleasure
  Would you give us lifelong sorrow?

Think of sisters, wives, and mothers,
  Of helpless babes in some low slum,
Think not of yourself, but others,
  Vote against the Demon Rum."

Eugene shuddered, and looked up at Gant's white emblem with coy pride. They walked happily by unhappy alcoholics, deltaed in foaming eddies of innocence, and smiling murderously down at some fond mother's treasure.

If they were mine I'd warm their little tails, they thought—privately.

Outside the corrugated walls of the warehouse, Gant paused for a moment to acknowledge the fervent congratulation of a group of ladies from the First Baptist Church: Mrs. Tarkinton, Mrs. Fagg Sluder, Mrs. C. M. McDonnel, and Mrs. W. H. (Pett) Pentland, who, heavily powdered, trailed her long skirt of gray silk with a musty rustle, and sneered elegantly down over her whaleboned collar. She was very fond of Gant.

"Where's Will?" he asked.

"Feathering the pockets of the licker interests, when he ought to be down here doing the Lord's Work," she replied with Christian bitterness. "Nobody but you knows what I've had to put up with, Mr. Gant. You've had to put up with the queer Pentland streak, in your own home," she added with lucid significance.

He shook his head regretfully, and stared sorrowfully at the gutter.

"Ah, Lord, Pett! We've been through the mill—both of us."

A smell of drying roots and sassafras twisted a sharp spiral from the warehouse into the thin slits of his nostrils.

"When the time comes to speak up for the right," Pett announced to several of the ladies, "you'll always find Will Gant ready to do his part."

With far-seeing statesmanship he looked westward toward Pisgah.

"Licker," he said, "is a curse and a care. It has caused the sufferings of untold millions——"

"Amen, Amen," Mrs. Tarkinton chanted softly, swaying her wide hips rhythmically.

"—it has brought poverty, disease, and suffering to hundreds of thousands of homes, broken the hearts of wives and mothers, and taken bread from the mouths of little orphaned children."

"Amen, brother."

"It has been," Gant began, but at this moment his uneasy eye lighted upon the broad red face of Tim O'Doyle and the fierce whiskered whiskiness of Major Ambrose Nethersole, two prominent publicans, who were standing near the entrance not six feet away and listening attentively.

"Go on!" Major Nethersole urged, with the deep chest notes of a bullfrog. "Go on, W. O., but for God's sake, don't belch!"

"Begod!" said Tim O'Doyle, wiping a tiny rill of tobacco juice from the thick simian corner of his mouth, "I've seen him start for the door and step through the windey. When we see him coming we hire two extra bottle openers. He used to give the barman a bonus to get up early."

"Pay no attention to them, ladies, I beg of you," said Gant scathingly. "They are the lowest of the low, the whisky-besotted dregs of humanity, who deserve to bear not even the name of men, so far have they retrograded backwards."

With a flourishing sweep of his slouch hat he departed into the warehouse.

"By God!" said Ambrose Nethersole approvingly. "It takes

W. O. to tie a knot in the tail of the English language. It always did."

But within two months he moaned bitterly his unwetted thirst. For several years he ordered, from time to time, the alloted quota—a gallon of whisky every two weeks—from Baltimore. It was the day of the blind tiger. The town was mined thickly with them. Bad rye and moonshine corn were the prevailing beverages. He grew old, he was sick, he still drank.

A slow trickle of lust crawled painfully down the parched gulley of desire, and ended feebly in dry fumbling lechery. He made pretty young summer widows at Dixieland presents of money, underwear, and silk stockings, which he drew on over their shapely legs in the dusty gloom of his little office. Smiling with imperturbable tenderness, Mrs. Selborne thrust out her heavy legs slowly to swell with warm ripe smack his gift of flowered green-silk garters. Wetting his thumb with sly thin after-smile, he told.

A grass widow, forty-nine, with piled hair of dyed henna, corseted breasts and hips architecturally protuberant in a sharp diagonal, meaty mottled arms, and a gulched face of leaden flaccidity puttied up brightly with cosmetics, rented the upstairs of Woodson Street while Helen was absent.

"She looks like an adventuress, hey?" said Gant hopefully.

She had a son. He was fourteen, with a round olive face, a soft white body, and thin legs. He bit his nails intently. His hair and eyes were dark, his face full of sad stealth. He was wise and made himself unobtrusively scarce at proper times.

Gant came home earlier. The widow rocked brightly on the porch. He bowed sweepingly, calling her *Madam.* Coy-kittenish, she talked down at him, slogged against the creaking stair rail. She leered cosily at him. She came and went freely through his sitting-room, where he now slept. One evening, just after he had entered, she came in from the bathroom, scented lightly with the best soap, and beefily moulded into a flame-red kimono.

A handsome woman yet, he thought. Good evening, madam. He got up from his rocker, put aside the crackling sheets of the evening paper (Republican), and unclipped his steel-rimmed glasses from the great blade of his nose.

She came over with sprightly gait to the empty hearth, clasping her wrapper tightly with veinous hands.

Swiftly, with a gay leer, she opened the garment, disclosing her thin legs, silkshod, and her lumpy hips, gaudily clothed in ruffled drawers of blue silk.

"Aren't they pretty?" she twittered invitingly but obscurely. Then, as he took an eager stride forward, she skipped away like a ponderous mænad soliciting Bacchic pursuit.

"A pair of pippins," he agreed, inclusively.

After this, she prepared breakfast for him. From Dixieland, Eliza surveyed them with a bitter eye. He had no talent for concealment. His visits morning and evening were briefer, his tongue more benevolent.

"I know what you're up to down there," she said. "You needn't think I don't."

He grinned sheepishly and wet his thumb. Her mouth worked silently at attempted speech for a moment. She speared a frying steak and flipped it over on its raw back, smiling vengefully in a mounting column of greasy blue vapor. He poked her clumsily with his stiff fingers; she shrieked a protest mixed of anger and amusement, and moved awkwardly out of his reach with bridling gait.

"Get away! I don't want you round me! It's too late for that." She laughed with nagging mockery.

"Don't you wish you could, though? I'll vow!" she continued, kneading her lips for several seconds in an effort to speak. "I'd be ashamed. Every one's laughing at you behind your back."

"You lie! By God, you lie!" he thundered magnificently, touched. Hammer-hurling Thor.

But he tired very quickly of his new love. He was weary, and frightened by his depletion. For a time he gave the widow small sums of money, and forgot the rent. He transferred to her his storming abuse, muttered ominously to himself in long aisle-pacings at his shop, when he saw that he had lost the ancient freedom of his house and saddled himself with a tyrannous hag. One evening he returned insanely drunk, routed her out of her chamber and pursued her unfrocked, untoothed, unputtied, with a fluttering length of kimono in her palsied hand, driving her finally into the yard beneath the big cherry tree, which he circled, howling, making frantic lunges for her as she twittered with fear, casting splintered glances all over the listening neighborhood as she put on the crumpled wrapper, hid partially the indecent jigging of her breasts, and implored succor. It did not come.

"You bitch!" he screamed. "I'll kill you. You have drunk my heart's-blood, you have driven me to the brink of destruction, and you gloat upon my misery, listening with fiendish delight to my death-rattle, bloody and unnatural monster that you are."

She kept the tree deftly between them and, when his attention was diverted for a moment to the flood of anathema, tore off on fear-quick feet, streetward to the haven of the Tarkintons' house. As she rested there, in Mrs. Tarkinton's consolatory arms, weeping hysterically and dredging gullies in her poor painted face, they heard his chaotic footsteps blundering within his house, the heavy crash of furniture, and his fierce curse when he fell.

"He'll kill himself! He'll kill himself!" she cried. "He doesn't know what he's doing. Oh, my God!" she wept. "I've never been talked to that way by any man in my life!"

Gant fell heavily within his house. There was silence. She rose fearfully.

"He's not a bad man," she whispered.

One morning in early summer, after Helen had returned, Eugene was wakened by scuffling feet and excited cries along the small board-walk that skirted the house on its upper side and led to the playhouse, a musty little structure of pine with a single big room, which he could almost touch from the sloping roof that flowed about his gabled backroom window. The playhouse was another of the strange extravagancies of Gantian fancy: it had been built for the children when they were young. It had been for many years closed, it was a retreat of delight; its imprisoned air, stale and cool, was scented permanently with old pine boards, cased books, and dusty magazines.

For some weeks now it had been occupied by Mrs. Selborne's

South Carolina cook, Annie, a plump comely negress of thirty-five, with a rich coppery skin. The woman had come into the mountains for the summer: she was a good cook and expected work at hotels or boarding-houses. Helen engaged her for five dollars a week. It was an act of pride.

That morning, Gant had wakened earlier and stared at his ceiling thoughtfully. He had risen, dressed, and wearing his leather slippers, walked softly back, along the boards, to the playhouse. Helen was roused by Annie's loud protests. Tingling with premonition she came down stairs, and found Gant wringing his hands and moaning as he walked up and down the wash-room. Through the open doors she heard the negress complaining loudly to herself as she banged out drawers and slammed her belongings together.

"I ain't used to no such goins-on. I'se a married woman, I is. I ain't goin' to stay in dis house anothah minnit."

Helen turned furiously upon Gant and shook him.

"You rotten old thing, you!" she cried. "How dare you!"

"Merciful God!" he whined, stamping his foot like a child, and pacing up and down. "Why did this have to come upon me in my old age!" He began to sniffle affectedly. "Boo-hoo-hoo! O Jesus, it's fearful, it's awful, it's cruel that you should put this affliction on me." His contempt for reason was Parnassian. He accused God for exposing him; he wept because he had been caught.

Helen rushed out to the playhouse and with large gesture and hearty entreaty strove to appease outraged Annie.

"Come on, Annie," she coaxed. "I'll give you a dollar a week more if you stay. Forget about it!"

"No'm," said Annie stubbornly. "I cain't stay heah any longer. I'se afraid of dat man."

Gant paused in his distracted pacing from time to time long enough to cock an eager ear. At each iteration of Annie's firm refusals, he fetched out a deep groan and took up his lament again.

Luke, who had descended, had fidgeted about in a nervous prance from one large bare foot to another. Now he went to the door and looked out, bursting suddenly into a large Whah-Whah as he caught sight of the sullen respectability of the negress' expression. Helen came back into the house with an angry perturbed face.

"She'll tell this all over town," she announced.

Gant moaned in lengthy exhalations. Eugene, shocked at first, and frightened, flung madly across the kitchen linoleum in twisting leaps, falling catlike on his bare soles. He squealed ecstatically at Ben who loped in scowling, and began to snicker in short contemptuous fragments.

"And of course she'll tell Mrs. Selborne all about it, as soon as she goes back to Henderson," Helen continued.

"O my God!" Gant whined, "why was this put on me——"

"O gotohell! 'Gotohell!" she said comically, her wrath loosened suddenly by a ribald and exasperated smile. They howled.

"I jhall dy-ee."

Eugene choked in faint hiccoughs and began to slide gently down the kitchen-washroom door jamb.

"Ah! you little idiot!" Ben snarled, lifting his white hand sharply. He turned away quickly with a flickering smile.

At this moment, Annie appeared on the walk outside the door, with a face full of grieved decorum.

Luke looked nervously and gravely from his father to the negress, fidgeting from one big foot to the other.

"I'se a married woman," said Annie. "I ain't used to nothin' like dis. I wants my money."

Luke blew up in an explosion of wild laughter.

"Whah-whah!" He pronged her larded ribs with scooped fingers. She moved away angrily, muttering.

Eugene lolled about feebly on the floor, kicking one leg out gently as if he had just been decapitated, and fumbling blindly at the neckband of his nightshirt. A faint clucking sound came at intervals from his wide-open mouth.

They laughed wildly, helplessly, draining into mad laughter all the welled and agglutinated hysteria that had gathered in them, washing out in a moment of fierce surrender all the fear and fatality of their lives, the pain of age and death.

Dying, he walked among them, whining his lament against God's lidless stare, gauging their laughter cautiously with uneasy prying eyes, a faint tickled grin playing craftily about his wailing mouth.

Roofing the deep tides, swinging in their embrace, rocked Eliza's life Sargassic, as when, at morning, a breath of kitchen air squirmed through her guarded crack of door, and fanned the pendant clusters of old string in floating rhythm. She rubbed the sleep gently from her small weak eyes, smiling dimly as she thought, unwakened, of ancient losses. Her worn fingers still groped softly in the bed beside her, and when she found it vacant, she awoke. Remembered. My youngest, my oldest, final bitter fruit, O dark of soul, O far and lonely, where? Remembered O his face! Death-son, partner of my peril, last coinage of my flesh, who warmed my flanks and nestled to my back. Gone? Cut off from me? When? Where?

The screen slammed, the market boy dumped ground sausage on the table, a negress fumbled at the stove. Awake now.

Ben moved quietly, but not stealthily, about, confessing and denying nothing. His thin laughter pierced the darkness softly above the droning creak of the wooden porch-swing. Mrs. Pert laughed gently, comfortingly. She was forty-three: a large woman of gentle manners, who drank a great deal. When she was drunk, her voice was soft, low, and fuzzy, she laughed uncertainly, mildly, and walked with careful alcoholic gravity. She dressed well: she was well fleshed, but not sensual-looking. She had good features, soft oaken hair, blue eyes, a little bleared. She laughed with a comfortable, happy chuckle. They were all very fond of her. Helen called her "Fatty."

Her husband was a drug salesman: he travelled through Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi, and returned to Altamont for a fortnight every four months. Her daughter, Catherine, who was almost Ben's age, came to Dixieland for a few weeks each summer. She was a school-teacher in a public school in a Tennessee village. Ben squired both.

Mrs. Pert chuckled softly when she spoke to him, and called him "Old Ben." In the darkness he sat, talking a little, humming a little, laughing occasionally in his thin minor key, quietly, with a cigarette between his forked ivory fingers, drawing deeply. He would buy a flask of whisky and they would drink it very quietly. Perhaps they talked a little more. But they were never riotous. Occasionally, they would rise at midnight from the swing, and go out into the street, departing under leafy trees. They would not return during the night. Eliza, ironing out a great pile of rumpled laundry in the kitchen, would listen. Presently, she would mount the stairs, peer carefully into Mrs. Pert's room, and descend, her lips thoughtfully kneaded.

She had to speak these things to Helen. There was a strange defiant communion between them. They laughed or were bitter together.

"Why, of course," said Helen, impatiently, "I've known it all along." But she looked beyond the door curiously, her big gold-laced teeth half-shown in her opened mouth, the child look of belief, wonder, scepticism, and hurt innocency in her big highboned face.

"Do you suppose he really does? Oh surely not, mama. She's old enough to be his mother."

Across Eliza's white puckered face, thoughtful and reproving, a sly smile broke. She rubbed her finger under the broad wings of her nose to conceal it, and snickered.

"I tell you what!" she said. "He's a chip off the old block. His father over again," she whispered. "It's in the blood."

Helen laughed huskily, picking vaguely at her chin, and gazing out across the weedy garden.

"Poor old Ben!" she said, and her eyes, she did not know why, were sheeted with tears. "Well, 'Fatty's' a lady. I like her—I don't care who knows it," she added defiantly. "It's their business anyway. They're quiet about it. You've got to say that much for them."

She was silent a moment.

"Women are crazy about him," she said. "They like the quiet ones, don't they? He's a gentleman."

Eliza shook her head portentously for several moments.

"What do you think!" she whispered, and shook her pursed lips again. "Always ten years older at least."

"Poor old Ben!" Helen said again.

"The quiet one. The sad one. I tell you what!" Eliza shook her head, unable to speak. Her eyes too were wet.

They thought of sons and lovers: they drew closer in their communion, they drank the cup of their twin slavery as they thought of the Gant men who would always know hunger, the strangers on the land, the unknown farers who had lost their way. O lost!

The hands of women were hungry for his crisp hair. When they came to the paper office to insert advertisements they asked for him. Frowning gravely, he leaned upon the counter with feet crossed, reading, in a somewhat illiterate monotone, what they had written. His thin hairy wrists slatted leanly against his starched white cuffs, his strong nervous fingers, ivoried by nicotine, smoothed out the crumples. Scowling intently, he bent his fine head, erasing, arranging. Empathic lady-fingers twitched. "How's that?" Answers vague-voiced, eyes tangled in crisp hair. "Oh, much better, thank you."

Wanted: frowning boy-man head for understanding fingers of mature and sympathetic woman. Unhappily married. Address Mrs. B. J. X., Box 74. Eight cents a word for one insertion. "Oh, [tenderly] thank you, Ben."

"Ben," said Jack Eaton, the advertising manager, thrusting his plump face into the city editor's office, "one of your harem's out there. She wanted to murder me when I tried to take it. See if she's got a friend."

"Oh, listen to this, won't you?" Ben snickered fiercely to the City Editor. "You missed your calling, Eaton. What you want is the end-man's job with Honeyboy Evans."

Scowling, he cast the cigarette from his ivory hand, and loped out into the office. Eaton remained a moment to laugh with the City Editor. O rare Ben Gant!

Sometimes, returning late at night to Woodson Street, in the crowded summer season, he slept with Eugene in the front room upstairs where they had all been born. Propped high on pillows in the old cream-colored bed, painted gaily at head and foot with round medals of clustering fruit, he read aloud in a quiet puzzled voice, fumbling over pronunciation, the baseball stories of Ring Lardner. *You know me, Al.* Just outside the windows the flat veranda roof was still warm from its daytime exhalations of tar-calked tin. Rich cobwebbed grapes hung in packed clusters among the broad leaves. *I didn't raise my boy to be a southpaw. I've a good mind to give Gleason a sock in the eye.*

Ben read painfully, pausing a moment later to snicker. Thus, like a child, he groped intently at all meanings, with scowling studiousness. Women liked to see him scowl and study so. He was sudden only in anger, and in his quick communications with his angel.

XXII

Toward the beginning of Eugene's fourteenth year, when he had been a student at Leonard's for two years, Ben got work for him as a paper carrier. Eliza grumbled at the boy's laziness. She complained that she could get him to do little or nothing for her. In fact, he was not lazy, but he hated all the dreariness of boarding-house routine. Her demands on him were not heavy, but they were frequent and unexpected. He was depressed at the uselessness of effort in Dixieland, at the total erasure of all daily labor. If she had given him position, the daily responsibility of an ordered task, he could have fulfilled it with zeal. But her own method was much too random: she wanted to keep him on tap for an occasional errand, and he did not have her interest.

Dixieland was the heart of her life. It owned her. It appalled him. When she sent him to the grocer's for bread, he felt wearily that the bread would be eaten by strangers, that nothing out of the effort of their lives grew younger, better, or more beautiful, that all was erased in a daily wash of sewage. She sent him forth in the rank thicket of her garden to hoe out the swarming weeds that clustered about her vegetables, which flourished, as did all the earth, under her careless touch. He knew, as he chopped down in a weary frenzy, that the weeds would grow again in the hot sun-stench, that her vegetables—weeded or not—would grow fat and be fed to her boarders, and that her life, hers alone, would endure to something. As he looked at her, he felt the weariness and horror of time: all but her must die in a smothering Sargasso. Thus, flailing the clotted earth drunkenly, he would be brought to suddenly by her piercing scream from the high back porch, and realize that he had destroyed totally a row of young bladed corn.

"Why, what on earth, boy!" she fretted angrily, peering down at him through a shelving confusion of wash-tubs, limp drying stockings, empty milk-bottles, murky and unwashed, and rusty lard-buckets. "I'll vow!" she said, turning to Mr. Baskett, the Hattiesburg cotton merchant, who grinned down malarially through his scraggly mustaches, "what am I going to do with him? He's chopped down every stock of corn in the row."

"Yes," Mr. Baskett said, peering over, "and missed every weed. Boy," he added judicially, "you need two months on a farm."

The bread that I fetch will be eaten by strangers. I carry coal and split up wood for fires to warm them. Smoke. *Fuimus fumus.* All of our life goes up in smoke. There is no structure, no creation in it, not even the smoky structure of dreams. Come lower, angel; whisper in our ears. We are passing away in smoke and there is nothing to-day but weariness to pay us for yesterday's toil. How may we save ourselves?

He was given the Niggertown route—the hardest and least profitable of all. He was paid two cents a copy for weekly deliveries, given ten per cent of his weekly collections, and ten cents for every new subscription. Thus, he was able to earn four or five dollars a week. His thin undeveloped body drank sleep with insatiable thirst, but it was now necessary for him to get up at half-past three in the morning with darkness and silence making an unreal humming in his drugged ears.

Strange aerial music came fluting out of darkness, or over his slow-wakening senses swept the great waves of symphonic orchestration. Fiend-voices, beautiful and sleep-loud, called down through darkness and light, developing the thread of ancient memory.

Staggering blindly in the whitewashed glare, his eyes, sleep-corded, opened slowly as he was born anew, umbilically cut, from darkness.

Waken, ghost-eared boy, but into darkness. Waken, phantom, O into us. Try, try, O try the way. Open the wall of light. Ghost, ghost, who is the ghost? O lost. Ghost, ghost, who is the ghost? O whisper-tongued laughter. Eugene! Eugene! Here, O here, Eugene. Here, Eugene. The way is here, Eugene. Have you forgotten? The leaf, the rock, the wall of light. Lift up the rock, Eugene, the leaf, the stone, the unfound door. Return, return

A voice, sleep-strange and loud, forever far-near, spoke.

Eugene!

Spoke, ceased, continued without speaking, to speak. In him spoke. Where darkness, son, is light. Try, boy, the word you know remember. In the beginning was the logos. Over the border the borderless green-forested land. Yesterday, remember?

Far-forested, a horn-note wound. Sea-forested, water-far, the grotted coral sea-far horn-note. The pillioned ladies witch-faced in bottle-green robes saddle-swinging. Merwomen unscaled and lovely in sea-floor colonnades. The hidden land below the rock. The flitting wood-girls growing into bark. Far-faint, as he wakened, they besought him with lessening whir. Then deeper song, fiend-throated, wind-shod. Brother, O brother! They shot down the brink of darkness, gone on the wind like bullets. O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.

He dressed and descended the stairs gently to the back porch. The cool air, charged with blue starlight, shocked his body into wakefulness, but as he walked townward up the silent streets, the strange ringing in his ears persisted. He listened, like his own ghost, to his footsteps, heard from afar the winking flicker of the street-lamps, saw, from sea-sunk eyes, the town.

There sounded in his heart a solemn music. It filled the earth, the air, the universe; it was not loud, but it was omnipresent, and it spoke to him of death and darkness, and of the focal march of all who lived or had lived, converging on a plain. The world was filled with silent marching men: no word was spoken, but in the heart of each there was a common knowledge, the word that all men knew and had forgotten, the lost key opening the prison gates, the lane-end into heaven, and as the music soared and filled him, he cried: "I will remember. When I come to the place, I shall know."

Hot bands of light streamed murkily from the doors and windows of the office. From the press-room downstairs there was an ascending roar as the big press mounted to its capacity. As he entered the office and drank in the warm tides of steel and ink that soaked the air, he awoke suddenly, his light-drugged limbs solidifying with a quick shock, as would some ærial spirit, whose floating body corporealizes the instant it touches earth. The carriers, waiting in a boisterous line, filed up to the circulation manager's desk, depositing their collections, cold handfuls of greasy coin. Seated beneath a green-shaded light, he ran swiftly down their books, totalling up their figures and counting nickels, dimes, and pennies into the little spooned trays of a drawer. Then he gave to each a scrawled order for his morning quota.

They ran downstairs, eager as whippets to be off, brandishing their slips at a sullen counter whose black fingers galloped accurately across the stiff ridges of a great sheaf. He allowed them two "extras." If the carrier was not scrupulous, he increased his number of spare copies by keeping on his book the names of a half-dozen discontinued subscribers. These surplus copies were always good for coffee and pie with the lunch-man, or as tribute to a favorite policeman, fireman, or motorman.

In the press-pit Harry Tugman loafed under their stare comfortably, a fat trickle of cigarette smoke coiling from his nostrils. He glanced over the press with professional carelessness, displaying his powerful chest with its thick bush, which lay a dark blot under his sweat-wet under-shirt. An assistant pressman climbed nimbly among roaring pistons and cylinders, an oil-can and a bunch of waste in his hand. A broad river of white paper rushed constantly up from the cylinder and leaped into a mangling chaos of machinery whence it emerged a second later, cut, printed, folded and stacked, sliding along a board with a hundred others in a fattening sheaf.

Machine-magic! Why not men, like that? Doctor, surgeon, poet, priest—stacked, folded, printed.

Harry Tugman cast away his wet fragment of cigarette with a luxurious grimace. The carriers eyed him reverently. Once he had knocked a sub-pressman down for sitting in his chair. He was Boss. He got $55 a week. If he was not pleased he could get work at any time on the *New Orleans Times-Picayune,* the *Louisville Courier Journal,* the *Atlanta Constitution,* the *Knoxville Sentinel,* the *Norfolk Pilot.* He could travel.

In a moment more they were out on the streets, hobbling along rapidly under the accustomed weight of the crammed canvas bags.

He was most desperately afraid of failure. He listened with constricted face to Eliza's admonition.

"Spruce up, boy! Spruce up! Make them think you are somebody!"

He had little confidence in himself; he recoiled in advance from the humiliation of dismissal. He feared the sabre-cut of language, and before his own pride he drew back and was afraid.

For three mornings he accompanied the retiring carrier, gathering his mind to focal intensity while he tried to memorize each stereotyped movement of the delivery, tracing again and again the labyrinthine web of Niggertown, wreaking his plan out among the sprawled chaos of clay and slime, making incandescent those houses to which a paper was delivered, and forgetting the others. Years later, alone in darkness, when he had forgotten the twisted anarchy of that pattern, he still remembered a corner where he left his bag while he climbed a spur of hill, a bank down which he clambered to three rotting shacks, a high porched house into which accurately he shot his folded block of news.

The retiring carrier was a robust country boy of seventeen who had been given better employment at the paper office. His name was Jennings Ware. He was tough, good-humored, a little cynical, and he smoked a great many cigarettes. He was clothed in vitality and comfort. He taught his pupil when and where to expect the prying face of "Foxy," how to escape discovery under the lunch-room counter, and how to fold a paper and throw it with the speed and accuracy of a ball.

In the fresh pre-natal morning they began their route, walking down the steep hill of Valley Street into tropical sleep, past the stabled torpor of black sleepers, past all the illicit loves, the casual and innumerable adulteries of Niggertown. As the stiff block of paper thudded sharply on the flimsy porch of a shack, or smacked the loose boarding of a door, they were answered by a long sullen moan of discontent. They sniggered.

"Check this one off," said Jennings Ware, "if you can't collect next time. She owes for six weeks now."

"This one," he said, flipping a paper quietly on a door mat, "is good pay. They're good niggers. You'll get your money every Wednesday."

"There's a High Yaller in here," he said, hurling the paper against the door with a whizzing smack and smiling, as a young full-meated woman's yell of indignation answered, a thin devil's grin. "You can have that if you want it."

A wan smile of fear struggled across Eugene's mouth. Jennings Ware looked at him shrewdly, but did not press him. Jennings Ware was a good-hearted boy.

"She's a pretty good old girl," he said. "You've got a right to a few dead-heads. Take it out in trade."

They walked on down the dark unpaved street, folding papers rapidly during the intervals between delivery.

"It's a hell of a route," said Jennings Ware. "When it rains it's terrible. You'll go into mud up to your knees. And you can't collect from half the bastards." He hurled a paper viciously.

"But, oh man!" he said, after a moment. "If you want Jelly Roll you've come to the right place. I ain't kidding you!"

"With—with niggers?" Eugene whispered, moistening his dry lips.

Jennings Ware turned his red satirical face on him.

"You don't see any Society Belles around here, do you?" he said.

"Are niggers good?" Eugene asked in a small dry voice.

"Boy!" The word blew out of Jennings Ware's mouth like an explosion. He was silent a moment.

"There ain't nothing better," he said.

At first, the canvas strap of the paper-bag bit cruelly across his slender shoulders. He strained against the galling weight that pulled him earthwards. The first weeks were like a warring nightmare: day after day he fought his way up to liberation. He knew all the sorrow of those who carry weight; he knew, morning by morning, the aerial ecstasy of release As his load lightened with the progress of his route, his leaning shoulder rose with winged buoyancy, his straining limbs grew light: at the end of his labor his flesh, touched sensuously by fatigue, bounded lightly from the earth. He was Mercury chained by fardels, Ariel bent beneath a pack: freed, his wing-shod feet trod brightness. He sailed in air. The rapier stars glinted upon his serfdom: dawn reddened on release. He was like a sailor drowned within the hold, who gropes to life and morning through a hatch; a diver twined desperately in octopal feelers, who cuts himself from death and mounts slowly from the sea-floor into light.

Within a month a thick hummock of muscle hardened on his shoulder: he bent jubilantly into his work. He had now no fear of failure. His heart lifted like a proud crested cock. He had been dropped among others without favor, and he surpassed them. He was a lord of darkness; he exulted in the lonely sufficiency of his work. He walked into the sprawled chaos of the settlement, the rifleman of news for sleeping men. His fast hands blocked the crackling sheet, he swung his lean arm like a whip. He saw the pale stars drown, and ragged light break open on the hills. Alone, the only man alive, he began the day for men, as he walked by the shuttered windows and heard the long denned snore of the tropics. He walked amid this close thick sleep, hearing again the ghostly ring of his own feet, and the vast orchestral music of darkness. As the gray tide of morning surged westward he awoke.

And Eugene watched the slow fusion of the seasons; he saw the royal processional of the months; he saw the summer light eat like a river into dark; he saw dark triumph once again; and he saw the minute-winning days, like flies, buzz home to death.

In summer, full day had come before he finished: he walked home in a world of wakenings. The first cars were grouped on the Square as he passed, their new green paint giving them the pleasant appearance of fresh toys. The huge battered cans of the milkmen glinted cleanly in the sun. Light fell hopefully upon the swarthy greasiness of George Chakales, nightman of the Athens Cafe. The Hellenic Dawn. And in Uneeda No. 1, upon the Square, Eugene sat, washing an egg-sandwich down with long swallows of pungent coffee, stooled in a friendly company of motormen, policemen, chauffeurs, plasterers, and masons. It was very pleasant, he felt, to complete one's work when all the world was beginning theirs. He went home under singing trees of birds.

In autumn, a late red moon rode low in the skies till morning. The air was filled with dropping leaves, there was a solemn thunder of great trees upon the hills; sad phantasmal whisperings and the vast cathedral music deepened in his heart.

In winter, he went down joyously into the dark howling wind, leaning his weight upon its advancing wall as it swept up a hill; and when in early Spring the small cold rain fell from the reeking sky he was content. He was alone.

He harried his deficient subscribers for payment, with a wild tenacity. He accepted their easy promises without question; he hunted them down in their own rooms, or in the rooms of a neighbor, he pressed so doggedly that, at length, sullenly or good-humoredly, they paid a part of their debt. This was more than any of his predecessors had accomplished, but he fretted nervously over his accounts until he found that he had become, for the circulation manager, the exemplar for indolent boys. As he dumped his desperately gathered pile of "chicken feed" upon the man's desk, his employer would turn accusingly to a delinquent boy, saying:

"Look at that! He does it every week! Niggers, too!"

His pallid face would flame with joy and pride. When he spoke to the great man his voice trembled. He could hardly speak.

As the wind yelled through the dark, he burst into maniacal laughter. He leaped high into the air with a scream of insane exultancy, burred in his throat idiot animal-squeals, and shot his papers terrifically into the flimsy boarding of the shacks. He was free. He was alone. He heard the howl of a train-whistle, and it was not so far away. In the darkness he flung his arm out to the man on the rails, his goggled brother with steel-steady rail-fixed eyes.

He did not shrink so much, beneath the menace of the family fist. He was more happily unmindful of his own unworthiness.

Assembled with three or four of the carriers in the lunch-room, he learned to smoke: in the sweet blue air of Spring, as he sloped down to his route, he came to know the beauty of Lady Nicotine, the delectable wraith who coiled into his brain, left her poignant breath in his young nostrils, her sharp kiss upon his mouth.

He was a sharp blade.

The Spring drove a thorn into his heart, it drew a wild cry from his lips. For it, he had no speech.

He knew hunger. He knew thirst. A great flame rose in him. He cooled his hot face in the night by bubbling water jets. Alone, he wept sometimes with pain and ecstasy. At home the frightened silence of his childhood was now touched with savage restraint. He was wired like a race-horse. A white atom of inchoate fury would burst in him like a rocket, and for a moment he would be cursing mad.

"What's wrong with him? Is it the Pentland crazy streak coming out?" Helen asked, seated in Eliza's kitchen.

Eliza moulded her lips portentously for some time, shaking her head slowly.

"Why," she said, with a cunning smile, "don't you know, child?"

His need for the negroes had become acute. He spent his afternoons after school combing restlessly through the celled hive of Niggertown. The rank stench of the branch, pouring its thick brown sewage down a bed of worn boulders, the smell of wood-smoke and laundry stewing in a black iron yard-pot, and the low jungle cadences of dusk, the forms that slid, dropped, and vanished, beneath a twinkling orchestration of small sounds. Fat ropes of language in the dusk, the larded sizzle of frying fish, the sad faint twanging of a banjo, and the stamp, far-faint, of heavy feet; voices Nilotic, river-wailing, and the greasy light of four thousand smoky lamps in shack and tenement.

From the worn central butte round which the colony swarmed, the panting voices of the Calvary Baptist Church mounted, in an exhausting and unceasing frenzy, from seven o'clock until two in the morning, in their wild jungle wail of sin and love and death. The dark was hived with flesh and mystery. Rich wells of laughter bubbled everywhere. The cat-forms slid. Everything was immanent. Everything was far. Nothing could be touched.

In this old witch-magic of the dark, he began to know the awful innocence of evil, the terrible youth of an ancient race; his lips slid back across his teeth, he prowled in darkness with loose swinging arms, and his eyes shone. Shame and terror, indefinable, surged through him. He could not face the question in his heart.

A good part of his subscription list was solidly founded among decent and laborious darkies—barbers, tailors, grocers, pharmacists, and ginghamed black housewives, who paid him promptly on a given day each week, greeting him with warm smiles full of teeth, and titles of respect extravagant and kindly: "Mister," "Colonel," "General," "Governor," and so on. They all knew Gant.

But another part—the part in which his desire and wonder met—were "floaters," young men and women of precarious means, variable lives, who slid mysteriously from cell to cell, who peopled the night with their flitting stealth. He sought these phantoms fruitlessly for weeks, until he discovered that he might find them only on Sunday morning, tossed like heavy sacks across one another, in the fetid dark of a tenement room, a half-dozen young men and women, in a snoring exhaustion of whiskey-stupor and sexual depletion.

One Saturday evening, in the fading red of a summer twilight, he returned to one of these tenements, a rickety three-story shack, that dropped its two lower floors down a tall clay bank at the western ledge, near the whites. Two dozen men and women lived here. He was on the search for a woman named Ella Corpening. He had never been able to find her: she was weeks behind in her subscription. But her door stood open to-night: a warm waft of air and cooking food came up to him. He descended the rotten steps that climbed the bank.

Ella Corpening sat facing the door in a rocking chair, purring lazily in the red glow of a little kitchen range, with her big legs stretched comfortably out on the floor. She was a mulatto of twenty-six years, a handsome woman of Amazonian proportions, with smooth tawny skin.

She was dressed in the garments of some former mistress: she wore a brown woollen skirt, patent-leather shoes with high suede tops pearl-buttoned, and gray silk hose. Her long heavy arms shone darkly through the light texture of a freshly laundered white shirtwaist. A lacing of cheap blue ribbon gleamed across the heavy curve of her breasts.

There was a bubbling pot of cabbage and sliced fat pork upon the stove.

"Paper boy," said Eugene. "Come to collect."

"Is you de boy?" drawled Ella Corpening with a lazy movement of her arm. "How much does I owe?"

"$1.20," he answered. He looked meaningfully at one extended leg, where, thrust in below the knee, a wadded bank-note gleamed dully.

"Dat's my rent money," she said. "Can't give you dat. Dollah-twenty!" She brooded. "Uh! Uh!" she grunted pleasantly. "Don't seem lak it ought to be dat much."

"It is, though," he said, opening his account book.

"It mus' is," she agreed, "if de book say so."

She meditated luxuriously for a moment.

"Does you collec' Sunday mawnin'?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"You come roun' in de mawnin'," she said hopefully. "I'll have somethin' fo' yuh, sho. I'se waitin' fo' a white gent'man now. He's goin' gib me a dollah."

She moved her great limbs slowly, and smiled at him. Forked pulses beat against his eyes. He gulped dryly: his legs were rotten with excitement.

"What's—what's he going to give you a dollar for?" he muttered, barely audible.

"Jelly Roll," said Ella Corpening.

He moved his lips twice, unable to speak. She got up from her chair.

"What yo' want?" she asked softly. "Jelly Roll?"

"Want to see—to see!" he gasped.

She closed the door opening on the bank and locked it. The stove cast a grated glow from its open ashpan. There was a momentary rain of red cinders into the pit.

Ella Corpening opened the door beyond that, leading to another room. There were two dirty rumpled beds; the single window was bolted and covered by an old green shade. She lit a smoky little lamp, and turned the wick low.

There was a battered little dresser with a mottled glass, from which the blistered varnish was flaking. Over the screened hearth, on a low mantel, there was a Kewpie doll, sashed with pink ribbon, a vase with fluted edges and gilt flowers, won at a carnival, and a paper of pins. A calendar, also, by courtesy of the Altamont Coal and Ice Company, showing an Indian maid paddling her canoe down an alley of paved moonlight, and a religious motto in flowered scrollwork, framed in walnut: *God Loves Them Both.*

"What yo' want?" she whispered, facing him.

Far off, he listened to the ghost of his own voice.

"Take off your clothes."

Her skirt fell in a ring about her feet. She took off her starched waist. In a moment, save for her hose, she stood naked before him.

Her breath came quickly, her full tongue licked across her mouth.

"Dance!" he cried. "Dance!"

She began to moan softly, while an undulant tremor flowed through her great yellow body; her hips and her round heavy breasts writhed slowly in a sensual rhythm.

Her straight oiled hair fell across her neck in a thick shock. She extended her arms for balance, the lids closed over her large yellow eyeballs. She came near him. He felt her hot breath on his face, the smothering flood of her breasts. He was whirled like a chip in the wild torrent of her passion. Her powerful yellow hands gripped his slender arms round like bracelets. She shook him to and fro slowly, fastening him tightly against her pelt.

He strained back desperately against the door, drowning in her embrace.

"Get-'way-nigger. Get-'way," he panted thickly.

Slowly she released him: without opening her eyes, moaning, she slid back as if he had been a young tree. She sang, in a wailing minor key, with unceasing iteration:

"Jelly Roll! Je-e-e-ly Roll!"——

her voice falling each time to a low moan.

Her face, the broad column of her throat, and her deep-breasted torso were rilled with sweat. He fumbled blindly for the door, lunged across the outer room and, gasping, found his way into the air. Her chant, unbroken and undisturbed by his departure, followed him up the flimsy steps. He did not pause to get his breath until he came to the edge of the market square. Below him in the valley, across on the butte, the smoky lamps of Niggertown flared in the dusk. Faint laughter, rich, jungle-wild, welled up from hived darkness. He heard lost twangling notes, the measured thump of distant feet; beyond, above, more thin, more far than all, the rapid wail of sinners in a church.

XXIII

Ἐντεῦθεν ἐξελαύνει σταθμοὺς τρεῖς παραςάγγας πεντεκαίδεκα ἐπὶ τὸν Εὐφράτην ποταμὸν.

He did not tell the Leonards that he was working in the early morning. He knew they would oppose his employment, and that their opposition would manifest itself in the triumphant argument of lowered grades. Also, Margaret Leonard, he knew, would talk ominously of health undermined, of the promise of future years destroyed, of the sweet lost hours of morning sleep that could never be regained. He was really more robust now than he had ever been. He was heavier and stronger. But he sometimes felt a gnawing hunger for sleep: he grew heavy at mid-day, revived in the afternoon, but found it difficult to keep his sleepy brain fixed on a book after eight o'clock in the evening.

He learned little of discipline. Under the care of the Leonards he came even to have a romantic contempt for it. Margaret Leonard had the marvellous vision, of great people, for essences. She saw always the dominant color, but she did not always see the shadings. She was an inspired sentimentalist. She thought she "knew boys": she was proud of her knowledge of them. In fact, however, she had little knowledge of them. She would have been stricken with horror if she could have known the wild confusion of adolescence, the sexual nightmares of puberty, the grief, the fear, the shame in which a boy broods over the dark world of his desire. She did not know that every boy, caged in from confession by his fear, is to himself a monster.

She did not have knowledge. But she had wisdom. She found immediately a person's quality. Boys were her heroes, her little gods. She believed that the world was to be saved, life redeemed, by one of them. She saw the flame that burns in each of them, and she guarded it. She tried somehow to reach the dark gropings toward light and articulation, of the blunt, the stolid, the shamefast. She spoke a calm low word to the trembling racehorse, and he was still.

Thus, he made no confessions. He was still prison-pent. But he turned always to Margaret Leonard as toward the light: she saw the unholy fires that cast their sword-dance on his face, she saw the hunger and the pain, and she fed him—majestic crime!—on poetry.

Whatever of fear or shame locked them in careful silence, whatever decorous pretense of custom guarded their tongues, they found release in the eloquent symbols of verse. And by that sign, Margaret was lost to the good angels. For what care the ambassadors of Satan, for all the small fidelities of the letter and the word, if from the singing choir of earthly methodism we can steal a single heart—lift up, flame-tipped, one great lost soul to the high sinfulness of poetry?

The wine of the grape had never stained her mouth, but the wine of poetry was inextinguishably mixed with her blood, entombed in her flesh.

By the beginning of his fifteenth year Eugene knew almost every major lyric in the language. He possessed them to their living core, not in a handful of scattered quotations, but almost line for line. His thirst was drunken, insatiate: he added to his hoard entire scenes from Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell,* which he read by himself in German; the lyrics of Heine, and several folk songs. He committed to memory the entire passage in the *Anabasis,* the mounting and triumphal greek which described the moment when the starving remnant of the Ten Thousand had come at length to the sea, and sent up their great cry, calling it by name. In addition, he memorized some of the sonorous stupidities of Cicero, because of the sound, and a little of Cæsar, terse and lean.

The great lyrics of Burns he knew from music, from reading, or from hearing Gant recite them. But "Tam O'Shanter" Margaret Leonard read to him, her eyes sparkling with laughter as she read:

"In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'."

The shorter Wordsworth pieces he had read at grammar school. "My heart leaps up," "I wandered lonely as a cloud," and "Behold her, single in the field," he had known for years; but Margaret read him the sonnets and made him commit "The world is too much with us" to memory. Her voice trembled and grew low with passion when she read it.

He knew all the songs in Shakespeare's plays, but the two that moved him most were: "O mistress mine, where are you roaming?" which blew a far horn in his heart, and the great song from *Cymbeline:* "Fear no more the heat o' the sun." He had tried to read all the sonnets, and failed, because their woven density was too much for his experience, but he had read, and forgotten, perhaps half of them, and remembered a few which burned up from the page, strangely, immediately, like lamps for him.

Those that he knew were: "When, in the chronicle of wasted time," "To me, fair friend, you never can be old," "Let me not to the marriage of true minds," "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame," "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought," "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?", "From you have I been absent in the spring," and "That time of year thou mayest in me behold," the greatest of all, which Margaret brought him to, and which shot through him with such electric ecstasy when he came to "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang," that he could hardly hold his course unbroken through the rest of it.

He read all the plays save *Timon, Titus Andronicus, Pericles, Coriolanus,* and *King John,* but the only play that held his interest from first to last was *King Lear.* With most of the famous declamatory passages he had been familiar, for years, by Gant's recitation, and now they wearied him. And all the wordy pinwheels of the clowns, which Margaret laughed at dutifully, and exhibited as specimens of the master's swingeing wit, he felt vaguely were very dull. He never had any confidence in Shakespeare's humor—his Touchstones were not only windy fools, but dull ones.

"For my part I had rather bear with you than bear you; yet I should bear no cross if I did bear you, for I think you have no money in your purse."

This sort of thing reminded him unpleasantly of the Pentlands. The Fool in "Lear" alone he thought admirable—a sad, tragic, mysterious fool. For the rest, he went about and composed parodies, which, with a devil's grin, he told himself would split the sides of posterity. Such as: "Aye, nuncle, an if Shrove Tuesday come last Wednesday, I'll do the capon to thy cock, as Tom O'Ludgate told the shepherd when he found the cowslips gone. Dost bay with two throats, Cerberus? Down, boy, down!"

The admired beauties he was often tired of, perhaps because he had heard them so often, and it seemed to him, moreover, that Shakespeare often spoke absurdly and pompously when he might better have spoken simply, as in the scene where, being informed by the Queen of the death of his sister by drowning, Laertes says:

"Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears."

You really can't beat that (he thought). Aye, Ben! Would he had blotted a hundred! A thousand!

But he was deep in other passages which the elocutionist misses, such as the terrible and epic invocation of Edmund, in *King Lear,* drenched in evil, which begins:

"Thou, Nature, art my goddess,"

and ends,

"Now, gods, stand up for bastards."

It was as dark as night, as evil as Niggertown, as vast as the elemental winds that howled down across the hills: he chanted it in the black hours of his labor, into the dark and the wind. He understood; he exulted in its evil—which was the evil of earth, of illicit nature. It was a call to the unclassed; it was a cry for those beyond the fence, for rebel angels, and for all of the men who are too tall.

He knew nothing of the Elizabethan drama beyond Shakespeare's plays. But he very early came to know a little of the poetry of Ben Jonson, whom Margaret looked on as a literary

Falstaff, condoning, with the familiar weakness of the schoolmarm, his Gargantuan excesses as a pardonable whimsy of genius.

She was somewhat academically mirthful over the literary bacchanalia, as a professor in a Baptist college smacks his lips appetizingly and beams ruddily at his classes when he reads of sack and porter and tankards foaming with the musty ale. All this is part of the liberal tradition. Men of the world are broad-minded. Witness Professor Albert Thorndyke Firkins, of the University of Chicago, at the Falcon in Soho. Smiling bravely, he sits over a half-pint of bitter beer, in the company of a racing tout, a swaybacked barmaid, broad in the stern, with adjustable teeth, and three companionable tarts from Lisle street, who are making the best of two pints of Guinness. With eager impatience he awaits the arrival of G. K. Chesterton and E. V. Lucas.

"O rare Ben Jonson!" Margaret Leonard sighed with gentle laughter. "Ah, Lord!"

"My God, boy!" Sheba roared, snatching the suggested motif of conversation out of the air, and licking her buttered fingers noisily as she stormed into action. "God bless him!" Her hairy red face burned like clover, her veinous eyes were tearful bright. "God bless him, 'Gene! He was as English as roast beef and a tankard of musty ale!"

"Ah, Lord!" sighed Margaret. "He was a genius if ever there was one." With misty eyes she gazed far off, a thread of laughter on her mouth. "Whee!" she laughed gently. "Old Ben!"

"And say, 'Gene!" Sheba continued, bending forward with a fat hand gripped upon her knee. "Do you know that the greatest tribute to Shakespeare's genius is from his hand?"

"Ah, I tell you, boy!" said Margaret, with darkened eyes. Her voice was husky. He was afraid she was going to weep.

"And yet the fools!" Sheba yelled. "The mean little two-by-two pusillanimous swill-drinking fools——"

"Whee!" gently Margaret moaned. John Dorsey turned his chalk-white face to the boy and whined with vacant appreciation, winking his head pertly. Oh absently!

"—for that's all they are, have had the effrontery to suggest that he was jealous."

"Pshaw!" said Margaret impatiently. "There's nothing in that."

"Why, they don't know what they're talking about!" Sheba turned a sudden grinning face upon him. "The little upstarts! It takes us to tell 'em, 'Gene," she said.

He began to slide floorwards out of the wicker chair. John Dorsey slapped his meaty thigh, and bent forward whining inchoately, drooling slightly at the mouth.

"The Lord a' mercy!" he wheezed, gasping.

"I was talking to a feller the other day," said Sheba, "a lawyer that you'd think might know a *little* something, and I used a quotation out of *The Merchant of Venice* that every schoolboy knows—'The quality of mercy is not strained.' The man looked at me as if he thought I was crazy!"

"Great heavens!" said Margaret in a still voice.

"I said, 'Look here, Mr. So-and-so, you may be a smart lawyer, you may have your million dollars that they say you have, but there are a lot of things you don't know yet. There are a lot of things money can't buy, my sonny, and one of them is the society of cult-shered men and women.'"

"Why, pshaw!" said Mr. Leonard. "What do these little whipper-snappers know about the things of the mind? You might as well expect some ignorant darkey out in the fields to construe a passage in Homer." He grasped a glass half full of clabber, on the table, and tilting it intently in his chalky fingers, spooned out a lumpy spilth of curds which he slid, quivering, into his mouth. "No, sir!" he laughed. "They may be Big Men on the tax collector's books, but when they try to associate with educated men and women, as the feller says, 'they—they —' " he began to whine, " 'why, they just ain't nothin'.' "

"What shall it profit a man," said Sheba, "if he gain the whole world, and lose——"

"Ah, Lord!" sighed Margaret, shaking her smoke-dark eyes. "I tell you!"

She told him. She told him of the Swan's profound knowledge of the human heart, his universal and well-rounded characterization, his enormous humor.

"Fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock!" She laughed. "The fat rascal! Imagine a man keeping the time!"

And, carefully: "It was the custom of the time, 'Gene. As a matter of fact, when you read some of the plays of his contemporaries you see how much purer he is than they are." But she avoided a word, a line, here and there. The slightly spotty Swan—muddied a little by custom. Then, too, the Bible.

The smoky candle-ends of time. Parnassus As Seen From Mount Sinai: Lecture with lantern-slides by Professor McTavish (D.D.) of Presbyterian College.

"And observe, Eugene," she said, "he never made vice attractive."

"Why didn't he?" he asked. "There's Falstaff."

"Yes," she replied, "and you know what happened to him, don't you?"

"Why," he considered, "he died!"

"You see, don't you?" she concluded, with triumphant warning.

I see, don't I? The wages of sin. What, by the way, are the wages of virtue? The good die young.

Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo!
I really feel so blue!
  I was given to crime,
  And cut off in my prime
When only eighty-two.

"Then, note," she said, "how none of his characters stand still. You can see them grow, from first to last. No one is the same at the end as he was in the beginning."

In the beginning was the word. I am Alpha and Omega. The growth of Lear. He grew old and mad. There's growth for you.

This tin-currency of criticism she had picked up in a few courses at college, and in her reading. They were—are, perhaps, still—part of the glib jargon of pedants. But they did her no real injury. They were simply the things people said. She felt, guiltily, that she must trick out her teaching with these gauds: she was afraid that what she had to offer was not enough. What she had to offer was simply a feeling that was so profoundly right, so unerring, that she could no more utter great verse meanly than mean verse well. She was a voice that God seeks. She was the reed of demonic ecstasy. She was possessed, she knew not how, but she knew the moment of her possession. The singing tongues of all the world were wakened into life again under the incantation of her voice. She was inhabited. She was spent.

She passed through their barred and bolted boy-life with the direct stride of a spirit. She opened their hearts as if they had been lockets. They said: "Mrs. Leonard is sure a nice lady."

He knew some of Ben Jonson's poems, including the fine Hymn to Diana, "Queen and huntress, chaste and fair," and the great tribute to Shakespeare which lifted his hair at

". . . But call forth thundering Æschylus,
Euripides and Sophocles to us."——

and caught at his throat at:

"He was not for an age, but for all time!
And all the Muses still were in their prime . . ."

The elegy to little Salathiel Pavy, the child actor, was honey from the lion's mouth. But it was too long.

Of Herrick, sealed of the tribe of Ben, he knew much more. The poetry sang itself. It was, he thought later, the most perfect and unfailing lyrical voice in the language—a clean, sweet, small, unfaltering note. It is done with the incomparable ease of an inspired child. The young men and women of our century have tried to recapture it, as they have tried to recapture Blake and, a little more successfully, Donne.

Here a little child I stand
Heaving up my either hand;
Cold as paddocks though they be.

Here I lift them up to Thee,
For a benison to fall
On our meat and on us all. Amen.

There was nothing beyond this—nothing that surpassed it in precision, delicacy, and wholeness.

Their names dropped musically like small fat bird-notes through the freckled sunlight of a young world: prophetically he brooded on the sweet lost bird-cries of their names, knowing they never would return. Herrick, Crashaw, Carew, Suckling, Campion, Lovelace, Dekker. O sweet content, O sweet, O sweet content!

He read shelves of novels: all of Thackeray, all the stories of Poe and Hawthorne, and Herman Melville's *Omoo* and *Typee,* which he found at Gant's. Of *Moby Dick* he had never heard. He read a half-dozen Coopers, all of Mark Twain, but failed to finish a single book of Howells or James.

He read a dozen of Scott, and liked best of all *Quentin Durward,* because the descriptions of food were as bountiful and appetizing as any he had ever read.

Eliza went to Florida again during his fourteenth year and left him to board with the Leonards. Helen was drifting, with crescent weariness and fear, through the cities of the East and Middle-West. She sang for several weeks in a small cabaret in Baltimore, she moved on to Philadelphia and thumped out popular tunes on a battered piano at the music counter of a five and ten cent store, with studious tongue outthrust as she puzzled through new scores.

Gant wrote her faithfully twice a week—a blue but copious log of existence. Occasionally he enclosed small checks, which she saved, uncashed.

"Your mother," he wrote, "has gone off on another wild-goose chase to Florida, leaving me here alone to face the music, freeze, or starve. God knows what we'll all come to before the end of this fearful, hellish, and damnable winter, but I predict the poorhouse and soupkitchens like we had in the Cleveland administration. When the Democrats are in, you may as well begin to count your ribs. The banks have no money, people are out of work. You can mark my words everything will go to the tax-collector under the hammer before we're done. The temperature was 7 above when I looked this morning, coal has gone up seventy-five cents a ton. The Sunny South. Keep off the grass said Bill Nye. Jesus God! I passed the Southern Fuel Co. yesterday and saw old Wagner at the window with a fiendish smile of gloatation on his face as he looked out on the sufferings of the widows and orphans. Little does he care if they all freeze. Bob Grady dropped dead Tuesday morning as he was coming out of the Citizen's Bank. I had known him twenty-five years. He'd never been sick a day in his life. All, all are gone, the old familiar faces. Old Gant will be the next. I have been eating at Mrs. Sales' since your mother went away. You've never seen such a table as she keeps in your life—a profusion of fruits piled up in pyramids, stewed prunes, peaches, and preserves, big roasts of pork, beef, lamb, cold cuts of ham and tongue, and a half dozen vegetables in an abundance that beggars description. How in God's name she does it for thirty-five cents I don't know. Eugene is staying with the Leonards while your mother's away. I take him up to Sales' with me once or twice a week and give him a square meal. They look mighty serious when they see those long legs coming. God knows where he puts it all—he can eat more than any three people I ever saw. I suppose he gets pretty lean pickings at the school. He's got the lean and hungry Gant look. Poor child. He has no mother any more. I'll do the best I can for him until the smash comes. Leonard comes and brags about him every week. He says his equal is not to be found anywhere. Every one in town has heard of him. Preston Carr (who's sure to be the next governor) was talking to me about him the other day. He wants me to send him to the State university law school where he will make lifelong friends among the people of his own State, and then put him into politics. It's what I should have done. I'm going to give him a good education. The rest is up to him. Perhaps he'll be a credit to the name. You haven't seen him since he put on long pants. His mother picked out a beautiful suit at Moale's Christmas. He went down to Daisy's for Christmas and put them on. I bought him a cheap pair at the Racket

Store for every-day wear. He can save the good ones for Sunday. Your mother has let the Old Barn to Mrs. Revell until she gets back. I went in the other day and found it warm for the first time in my life. She keeps the furnace going and she's not afraid to burn coal. I hardly ever see Ben from one week to another. He comes in and prowls around in the kitchen at one and two o'clock in the morning and I'm up and gone hours before he's awake. You can get nothing out of him—he never says a half-dozen words and if you ask him a civil question he cuts you off short. I see him down-town late at night sometimes with Mrs. P. They're thick as thieves together. I guess she's a bad egg. This is all for this time. John Duke was shot and killed by the house detective at the Whitstone hotel Sunday night. He was drunk and threatening to shoot every one. It's a sad thing for his wife. He left three children. She was in to see me to-day. He was well-liked by every one but a terror when he drank. My heart bled for her. She's a pretty little woman. Liquor has caused more misery than all the other evils in the world put together. I curse the day it was first invented. Enclosed find a small check to buy yourself a present. God knows what we're coming to. Aff. Your Father, W. O. Gant."

She saved carefully all his letters—written on his heavy slick business stationery in the huge Gothic sprawl of his crippled right hand.

In Florida, meanwhile, Eliza surged up and down the coast, stared thoughtfully at the ungrown town of Miami, found prices too high at Palm Beach, rents too dear at Daytona, and turned inland at length to Orlando, where, groved round with linked lakes and citrous fruits, the Pentlands waited her approach, Pett, with a cold lust of battle on her face, Will with a grimace of itching nervousness while he scaled stubbily at the flaky tetter of his hand.

XXIV

WITH thick chalked fingers John Dorsey thoughtfully massaged his torso from loin to chin.

"Now, let me see," he whined with studious deliberation, "what he gives on this." He fumbled for the notes.

Tom Davis turned his reddening cheeks toward the window, a low sputter of laughter escaping from his screwed lips.

Guy Doak gazed solemnly at Eugene, with a forked hand stroking his grave pallid face.

"Entgegen," said Eugene, in a small choked voice, "follows its object."

John Dorsey laughed uncertainly, and shook his head, still searching the notes.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said.

Their wild laughter leaped like freed hounds. Tom Davis hurled himself violently downward over his desk. John Dorsey looked up, adding uncertainly his absent falsetto mirth.

From time to time, in spite of himself, they taught him a little German, a language of which he had been quite happily ignorant. The lesson had become for them a daily hunger: they worked it over with mad intensity, speeding and polishing their translation in order to enjoy his bewilderment. Sometimes, deliberately, they salted their pages with glib false readings, sometimes they interpolated passages of wild absurdity, waiting exultantly for his cautious amendment of a word that did not exist.

"Slowly the moonlight crept up the chair in which the old man was sitting, reaching his knees, his breast, and finally,"—Guy Doak looked up slyly at his tutor, "giving him a good punch in the eye."

"No-o," said John Dorsey, rubbing his chin, "not exactly. 'Catching him squarely in the eye' gets the idiom better, I think."

Tom Davis thrust a mouthful of strange gurgling noises into his desk, and waited for the classic evasion. It came at once.

"Let me see," said John Dorsey, turning the pages, "what he gives on this."

Guy Doak scrawled a brief message across a crumpled wad and thrust it on Eugene's desk. Eugene read:

"Gebe mir ein Stück Papier,
Before I bust you on the ear."

He detached two slick sheets from his tablet, and wrote in answer:

"Du bist wie eine bum-me."

They read sweet gluey little stories, fat German tear-gulps: *Immensee, Höher als die Kirche, Der Zerbrochene Krug.* Then, *Wilhelm Tell.* The fine lyrical measure of the opening song, the unearthly siren song to the fisher-boy, haunted them with its faery music. The heavy melodrama of some of the scenes was unhackneyed to them: they bent eagerly to the apple-shooting scene, and the escape by boat. As for the rest, it was, they wearily recognized, Great Literature. Mr. Schiller, they saw, was religiously impressed, like Patrick Henry, George Washington, and Paul Revere, with the beauties of Liberty. His embattled Swiss bounded ponderously from crag to crag, invoking it in windy speeches.

"The mountains," observed John Dorsey, touched, in a happy moment, by the genius of the place, "have been the traditional seat of Liberty."

Eugene turned his face toward the western ranges. He heard, far off, a whistle, a remote thunder on the rails.

During this season of Eliza's absence he roomed with Guy Doak.

Guy Doak was five years his senior. He was a native of Newark, New Jersey: his speech was touched with Yankee nasality, his manner with Yankee crispness. His mother, a boarding-house mistress, had come to Altamont a year or two before to retrieve her health: she was tubercular, and spent part of the winter in Florida.

Guy Doak had a trim cocky figure of medium height, black hair, bright dark eyes, a pale, very smooth oval face, somehow suggestive, Eugene thought, of a fish's belly, with somewhat unhappily full jaws which made his lower features seem larger than his upper. He was foppishly neat in his dress. People called him a good-looking boy.

He made few friends. To the boys at Leonard's this Yankee was far more remote than the rich Cuban boy, Manuel Quevado, whose fat dark laughter and broken speech was all for girls. He belonged to a richer South, but they knew him.

Guy Doak had none of their floridity. He was lacking in their hearty violence. He did not laugh loudly. He had a sharp, bright, shallow mind, inflexibly dogmatic. His companions were bad Southern romantics, he was a false Yankee realist. They arrived, thus, by different means, at a common goal of superstition. Guy Doak had already hardened into the American city-dweller's mould of infantile cynicism. He was occasionally merry with the other boys in the classic manner of the city fellow with the yokels. He was wise. Above all, he was wise. It was safe to assume, he felt, that Truth was always on the scaffold, and Wrong forever on the throne. So far from being depressed by the slaughter of the innocents, the spectacle gave him much bitter amusement.

Outside of this, Guy Doak was a very nice fellow—sharp, obstinate, unsubtle, and pleased with his wit. They lived on the first floor at Leonard's: at night, by a roaring wood fire, they listened carefully to the great thunder of the trees, and to the stealthy creaking foot-steps of the master as he came softly down the stairs, and paused by their door. They ate at table with Margaret, John Dorsey, Miss Amy, the two children, John Dorsey, junior, nine, and Margaret, five, and two of Leonard's Tennessee nephews—Tyson Leonard, a ferret-faced boy of eighteen, foul-mouthed and sly, and Dirk Barnard, a tall slender boy, seventeen, with a bumpy face, brown merry eyes, and a quick temper. At table they kept up a secret correspondence of innuendo and hidden movement, fleshing a fork in a grunting neighbor as John

Dorsey said the blessing, and choking with smothered laughter. At night, they tapped messages on floor and ceiling, crept out for sniggering conventions in the windy dark hall, and fled to their innocent beds as John Dorsey stormed down on them.

Leonard was fighting hard to keep his little school alive. He had less than twenty students the first year, and less than thirty the second. From an income of not more than $3,000 he had to pay Miss Amy, who had left a high school position to help him, a small salary. The old house on its fine wooded hill was full of outmoded plumbing and drafty corridors: he had leased it at a small rental. But the rough usage of thirty boys demanded a considerable yearly restoration. The Leonards were fighting very stubbornly and courageously for their existence.

The food was scant and poor: at breakfast, a dish of blue, watery oatmeal, eggs and toast; at lunch, a thin soup, hot sour cornbread, and a vegetable boiled with a piece of fat pork; at dinner, hot biscuits, a small meat loaf, and creamed or boiled potatoes. No one was permitted coffee or tea, but there was an abundance of fresh creamy milk. John Dorsey always kept and milked his own cow. Occasionally there was a deep, crusted pie, hot, yolky muffins, or spicy gingerbread of Margaret's make. She was a splendid cook.

Often, at night, Guy Doak slid quietly out through the window on to the side porch, and escaped down the road under the concealing roar of the trees. He would return from town within two hours, crawling in exultantly with a bag full of hot frankfurter sandwiches coated thickly with mustard, chopped onion, and a hot Mexican sauce. With a crafty grin he unfoiled two five-cent cigars, which they smoked magnificently, with a sharp tang of daring, blowing the smoke carefully up the chimney in order to thwart a possible irruption by the master. And Guy brought back, from the wind and the night, the good salt breath of gossip in street and store, news of the town, and the brave swagger of the drug-store gallants.

As they smoked and stuffed fat palatable bites of sandwich into their mouths, they would regard each other with pleased sniggers, carrying on thus an insane symphony of laughter:

"Chuckle, chuckle!—laugh of gloatation."

"Tee-hee, tee-hee, tee-hee!—laugh of titterosity."

"Snuh-huh, snuh-huh, snuh-huh!—laugh of gluttonotiousness."

The vigorous warmth of burning wood filled their room pleasantly: over their sheltered heads the dark gigantic wind howled through the earth. O sheltered love, nooked warmly in against this winter night. O warm fair women, whether within a forest hut, or by the town ledged high above the moaning seas, shot upon the wind, I come.

Guy Doak toyed gently at his belly with his right hand, and stroked his round chin slowly with his left.

"Now let me see," he whined, "what he gives on this."

Their laughter rang around the walls. Too late, they heard the aroused stealthy foot-falls of the master, creaking down the hall. Later—silence, the dark, the wind.

Miss Amy closed her small beautifully kept grade book, thrust her great arms upward, and yawned. Eugene looked hopefully at her and out along the playing court, reddened by the late sun. He was wild, uncontrollable, erratic. His mad tongue leaped out in class. He could never keep peace a full day. He amazed them. They loved him, and they punished him piously, affectionately. He was never released at the dismissal hour. He was always "kept in."

John Dorsey noted each whisper of disorder, or each failure in preparation, by careful markings in a book. Each afternoon he read the names of delinquents, amid a low mutter of sullen protest, and stated their penalties. Once Eugene got through an entire day without a mark. He stood triumphantly before Leonard while the master searched the record.

John Dorsey began to laugh foolishly; he griped his hand affectionately around the boy's arm.

"Well, sir!" he said. "There must be a mistake. I'm going to keep you in on general principles."

He bent to a long dribbling suction of laughter. Eugene's wild eyes were shot with tears of anger and surprise. He never forgot.

Miss Amy yawned, and smiled on him with slow powerful affectionate contempt.

"Go on!" she said, in her broad, lazy accent. "I don't want to fool with you any more. You're not worth powder enough to blow you up."

Margaret came in, her face furrowed deeply between smoke-dark eyes, full of tender sternness and hidden laughter.

"What's wrong with the rascal?" she asked. "Can't he learn algebra?"

"He can learn!" drawled Miss Amy. "He can learn anything. He's lazy—that's what it is. Just plain lazy."

She smacked his buttock smartly with a ruler.

"I'd like to warm you a bit with this," she laughed, slowly and richly. "You'd learn then."

"Here!" said Margaret, shaking her head in protest. "You leave that boy alone. Don't look behind the faun's ears. Never mind about algebra, here. That's for poor folks. There's no need for algebra where two and two make five."

Miss Amy turned her handsome gypsy eyes on Eugene.

"Go on. I've seen enough of you." She made a strong weary gesture of dismissal.

Hatless, with a mad whoop, he plunged through the door and leaped the porch rail.

"Here, boy!" Margaret called. "Where's your hat?"

Grinning, he galloped back, picked up a limp rag of dirty green felt, and pulled it over his chaotic hair. Curly tufts stuck through the gaping crease-holes.

"Come here!" said Margaret gravely. Her nervous fingers pulled his frayed necktie around to the front, tugged down his vest, and buttoned his coat over tightly, while he peered at her with his strange devil's grin. Suddenly she trembled with laughter.

"Good heavens, Amy," she said. "Look at that hat."

Miss Amy smiled at him with indifferent sleepy cat-warmth.

"You want to fix yourself up, 'Gene," she said, "so the girls will begin to notice you."

He heard the strange song of Margaret's laughter.

"Can you see him out courting?" she said. "The poor girl would think she had a demon lover, sure."

"As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover."

His eyes burned on her face, flowing with dark secret beauty.

"Get along, you scamp!" she ordered.

He turned, and, crying fiercely in his throat, tore down the road with bounding strides.

All the dusk blurred in her eyes.

"Leave him alone!" she whispered to no one. "Leave him alone!"

A light wind of April fanned over the hill. There was a smell of burning leaves and rubble around the school. In the field on the hill flank behind the house a plowman drove his big horse with loose clanking traces around a lessening square of dry fallow earth. Gee, woa. His strong feet followed after. The big share bit cleanly down, cleaving a deep spermy furrow of moist young earth along its track.

John Dorsey Leonard stared fascinated out the window at the annual rejuvenation of the earth. Before his eyes the emergent nymph was scaling her hard cracked hag's pelt. The golden age returned.

Down the road a straggling queue of boys were all gone into the world of light. Wet with honest sweat, the plowman paused at the turn, and wiped the blue shirting of his forearm across his beaded forehead. Meanwhile, his intelligent animal, taking advantage of the interval, lifted with slow majesty a proud flowing tail, and added his mite to the fertility of the soil with three moist oaty droppings. Watching, John Dorsey grunted approvingly. They also serve who only stand and wait.

"Please, Mr. Leonard," said Eugene, carefully choosing his moment, "can I go?"

John Dorsey Leonard stroked his chin absently, and stared sightlessly at his book. Others abide our question, thou art free.

"Huh?" he purred vaguely. Then, with a high vacant snigger he turned suddenly, and said:

"You rascal, you! See if Mrs. Leonard wants you." He fastened his brutal gripe with keen hunger into the boy's thin arm. April is the cruellest of months. Eugene winced, moved away, and then stood quietly, checked by memory of the old revolt from awe.

He found Margaret in the library reading to the children from *The Water Babies.*

"Mr. Leonard says to ask you if I can go?" he said.

And her eyes were darkened wholly.

"Yes, you scamp. Go on," she said. "Tell me, boy," she coaxed, softly, "can't you be a little bit better?"

"Yes'm," he promised, easily. "I'll try." Say not the struggle naught availeth.

She smiled at his high mettled prancing nervousness.

"In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'," she said gently. "Get out of here."

He bounded away from the nunnery of the chaste breast and quiet mind.

As he leaped down the stairs into the yard he heard Dirk Barnard's lusty splashing bathtub solo. Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song. Tyson Leonard, having raked into every slut's corner of nature with a thin satisfied grin, emerged from the barn with a cap full of fresh eggs. A stammering cackle of protest followed him from angry hens who found too late that men betray. At the barnside, under the carriage shed, "Pap" Rheinhart tightened the bellyband of his saddled brown mare, swinging strongly into the saddle, and with a hard scramble of hoofs, came up the hill, wheeled in behind the house, and drew up by Eugene.

"Jump on, 'Gene," he invited, patting the mare's broad rump. "I'll take you home."

Eugene looked up at him grinning.

"You'll take me nowhere," he said. "I couldn't sit down for a week last time."

"Pap" boomed with laughter.

"Why. pshaw, boy!" he said. "That was nothing but a gentle little dog-trot."

"Dog-trot your granny," said Eugene. "You tried to kill me."

"Pap" Rheinhart turned his wry neck down on the boy with grave dry humor.

"Come on," he said gruffly. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'll teach you how to ride a horse."

"Much obliged, Pap," said Eugene ironically. "But I'm thinking of using my tail a good deal in my old age. I don't want to wear it out while I'm young."

Pleased with them both, "Pap" Rheinhart laughed loud and deep, spat a brown quid back over the horse's crupper, and, digging his heels in smartly, galloped away around the house, into the road. The horse bent furiously to his work, like a bounding dog. With four-hooved thunder he drummed upon the sounding earth. *Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.*

At the two-posted entry, by the bishop's boundary, the departing students turned, split quickly to the sides, and urged the horseman on with shrill cries. "Pap," bent low, with loose-reined hands above the horse-mane, went through the gate like the whiz of a cross-bow. Then, he jerked the mare back on her haunches with a dusty skid of hoofs, and waited for the boys to come up.

"Hey!" With high bounding exultancy Eugene came down the road to join them. Without turning, stolid Van Yeats threw up his hand impatiently and greeted the unseen with a cheer. The others turned, welcoming him with ironical congratulation.

"'Highpockets,'" said "Doc" Hines, comically puckering his small tough face, "how'd you happen to git out on time?" He had an affected, high-pitched nigger drawl. When he spoke he kept one hand in his coat pocket, fingering a leather thong loaded with buckshot.

"J. D. had to do his spring plowing," said Eugene.

"Well, if it ain't ole Handsome," said Julius Arthur. He grinned squintily, revealing a mouthful of stained teeth screwed in a wire clamp. His face was covered with small yellow pustulate sores. How begot, how nourished?

"Shall we sing our little song for Handsome Hal?" said Ralph Rolls to his copesmate Julius. He wore a derby hat jammed over his pert freckled face. As he spoke he took a ragged twist of tobacco from his pocket and bit off a large chew with a rough air of relish.

"Want a chew, Jule?" he said.

Julius took the twist, wiped off his mouth with a loose male grin, and crammed a large quid into his cheek.

He brought me roots of relish sweet.

"Want one, Highpockets?" he asked Eugene, grinning.

I hate him that would upon the rack of this tough world stretch me out longer.

"Hell," said Ralph Rolls. "Handsome would curl up and die if he ever took a chew."

In Spring like torpid snakes my enemies awaken.

At the corner of Church Street, across from the new imitation Tudor of the Episcopal church, they paused. Above them, on the hill, rose the steeples of the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Ye antique spires, ye distant towers!

"Who's going my way?" said Julius Arthur. "Come on, 'Gene. The car's down here. I'll take you home."

"Thanks, but I can't," said Eugene. "I'm going up-town." Their curious eyes on Dixieland when I get out.

"You going home, Villa?"

"No," said George Graves.

"Well, keep Hal out of trouble," said Ralph Rolls.

Julius Arthur laughed roughly and thrust his hand through Eugene's hair. "Old Hairbreadth Hal," he said. "The cut-throat from Saw-Tooth Gap!"

"Don't let 'em climb your frame, son," said Van Yeats, turning his quiet pleasant face on Eugene. "If you need help, let me know."

"So long, boys."

"So long."

They crossed the street, mixing in nimble horse-play, and turned down past the church along a sloping street that led to the garages. George Graves and Eugene continued up the hill.

"Julius is a good boy," said George Graves. "His father makes more money than any other lawyer in town."

"Yes," said Eugene, still brooding on Dixieland and his clumsy deceptions.

A street-sweeper walked along slowly uphill, beside his deep wedge-bodied cart. From time to time he stopped the big slowfooted horse and, sweeping the littered droppings of street and gutter into a pan, with a long-handled brush, dumped his collections into the cart. Let not Ambition mock their useful toil.

Three sparrows hopped deftly about three fresh smoking globes of horse-dung, pecking out tidbits with dainty gourmandism. Driven away by the approaching cart, they skimmed briskly over to the bank, with bright twitters of annoyance. One too like thee, tameless, and swift, and proud.

George Graves ascended the hill with a slow ponderous rhythm, staring darkly at the ground.

"Say, 'Gene!" he said finally. "I don't believe he makes that much."

Eugene thought seriously for a moment. With George Graves, it was necessary to resume a discussion where it had been left off three days before.

"Who?" he said, "John Dorsey? Yes, I think he does," he added, grinning.

"Not over $2,500, anyway," said George Graves gloomily.

"No—three thousand, three thousand!" he said, in a choking voice.

George Graves turned to him with a sombre, puzzled smile. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"O you fool! You damn fool!" gasped Eugene. "You've been thinking about it all this time."

George Graves laughed sheepishly, with embarrassment, richly.

From the top of the hill at the left, the swelling unction of the Methodist organ welled up remotely from the choir, accompanied by a fruity contralto voice, much in demand at funerals. Abide with me.

Most musical of mourners, weep again!

George Graves turned and examined the four large black houses, ascending on flat terraces to the church, of Paston Place.

"That's a good piece of property, 'Gene," he said. "It belongs to the Paston estate."

Fast falls the even-tide. Heaves the proud harlot her distended breast, in intricacies of laborious song.

"It will all go to Gil Paston some day," said George Graves with virtuous regret. "He's not worth a damn."

They had reached the top of the hill. Church Street ended levelly a block beyond, in the narrow gulch of the avenue. They saw, with quickened pulse, the little pullulation of the town.

A negro dug tenderly in the round loamy flowerbeds of the Presbyterian churchyard, bending now and then to thrust his thick fingers gently in about the roots. The old church, with its sharp steeple, rotted slowly, decently, prosperously, like a good man's life, down into its wet lichened brick. Eugene looked gratefully, with a second's pride, at its dark decorum, its solid Scotch breeding.

"I'm a Presbyterian," he said. "What are you?"

"An Episcopalian, when I go," said George Graves with irreverent laughter.

"To hell with these Methodists!" Eugene said with an elegant, disdainful face. "They're too damn common for us." God in three persons—blessed Trinity. "Brother Graves," he continued, in a fat well-oiled voice, "I didn't see you at prayer-meeting Wednesday night. Where in Jesus' name were you?"

With his open palm he struck George Graves violently between his meaty shoulders. George Graves staggered drunkenly with high resounding laughter.

"Why, Brother Gant," said he, "I had a little appointment with one of the Good Sisters, out in the cow-shed."

Eugene gathered a telephone pole into his wild embrace, and threw one leg erotically over its second foot-wedge. George Graves leaned his heavy shoulder against it, his great limbs drained with laughter.

There was a hot blast of steamy air from the Appalachian Laundry across the street and, as the door from the office of the washroom opened, they had a moment's glimpse of negresses plunging their wet arms into the liquefaction of their clothes.

George Graves dried his eyes. Laughing wearily, they crossed over.

"We oughtn't to talk like that, 'Gene," said George Graves reproachfully. "Sure enough! It's not right."

He became moodily serious rapidly. "The best people in this town are church members," he said earnestly. "It's a fine thing."

"Why?" said Eugene, with an idle curiosity.

"Because," said George Graves, "you get to know all the people who are worth a damn."

Worth being damned, he thought quickly. A quaint idea.

"It helps you in a business way. They come to know you and respect you. You won't get far in this town, 'Gene, without them. It pays," he added devoutly, "to be a Christian."

"Yes," Eugene agreed seriously, "you're right." To walk together to the kirk, with a goodly company.

He thought sadly of his lost sobriety, and of how once, lonely, he had walked the decent lanes of God's Scotch town. Unbidden they came again to haunt his memory, the shaven faces of good tradesmen, each leading the well washed kingdom of his home in its obedient ritual, the lean hushed smiles of worship, the chained passion of devotion, as they implored God's love upon their ventures, or delivered their virgin daughters into the holy barter of marriage. And from even deeper adyts of his brain there swam up slowly to the shores of his old hunger the great fish whose names he scarcely knew—whose names, garnered with blind toil from a thousand books, from Augustine, himself a name, to Jeremy Taylor, the English metaphysician, were brief evocations of scaled light, electric, phosphorescent, illuminating by their magic connotations the vast far depths of ritual and religion: They came—Bartholomew, Hilarius, Chrysostomos, Polycarp, Anthony, Jerome, and the forty martyrs of Cappadocia who walked the waves—coiled like their own green shadows for a moment, and were gone.

"Besides," said George Graves, "a man ought to go anyway. Honesty's the best policy."

Across the street, on the second floor of a small brick three-story building that housed several members of the legal, medical, surgical, and dental professions, Dr. H. M. Smathers pumped vigorously with his right foot, took a wad of cotton from his assistant, Miss Lola Bruce, and thrusting it securely into the jaw of his unseen patient, bent his fashionable bald head intently. A tiny breeze blew back the thin curtains, and revealed him. white-jacketed, competent, drill in hand.

"Do you feel that?" he said tenderly.

"Wrogd gdo gurk!"

"Spit!" With thee conversing, I forget all time.

"I suppose," said George Graves thoughtfully, "the gold they use in people's teeth is worth a lot of money."

"Yes," said Eugene, finding the idea attractive, "if only one person in ten has gold fillings that would be ten million in the United States alone. You can figure on five dollars' worth each, can't you?"

"Easy!" said George Graves. "More than that." He brooded lusciously a moment. "That's a lot of money," he said.

In the office of the Rogers-Malone Undertaking Establishment the painful family of death was assembled, "Horse" Hines, tilted back in a swivel chair, with his feet thrust out on the broad window-ledge, chatted lazily with Mr. C. M. Powell, the suave silent partner. How sleep the brave, who sink to rest. Forget not yet.

"There's good money in undertaking," said George Graves "Mr. Powell's well off."

Eugene's eyes were glued on the lantern face of "Horse" Hines He beat the air with a convulsive arm, and sank his fingers in his throat.

"What's the matter?" cried George Graves.

"They shall not bury me alive," he said.

"You can't tell," George Graves said gloomily. "It's been known to happen. They've dug them up later and found them turned over on their faces."

Eugene shuddered. "I think," he suggested painfully, "they're supposed to take out your insides when they embalm you."

"Yes," said George Graves more hopefully, "and that stuff they use would kill you anyway. They pump you full of it."

With shrunken heart, Eugene considered. The ghost of old fear, that had been laid for years, walked forth to haunt him.

In his old fantasies of death he had watched his living burial, had foreseen his waking life-in-death, his slow, frustrated efforts to push away the smothering flood of earth until, as a drowning swimmer claws the air, his mute and stiffened fingers thrust from the ground a call for hands.

Fascinated, they stared through screen-doors down the dark central corridor, flanked by jars of weeping ferns. A sweet funereal odor of carnations and cedar-wood floated on the cool heavy air. Dimly, beyond a central partition, they saw a heavy casket, on a wheeled trestle, with rich silver handles and velvet coverings. The thick light faded there in dark.

"They're laid out in the room behind," said George Graves, lowering his voice.

To rot away into a flower, to melt into a tree with the friendless bodies of unburied men.

At this moment, having given to misery all he had (a tear), the very Reverend Father James O'Haley, S.J., among the faithless faithful only he, unshaken, unseduced, unterrified, emerged plumply from the chapel, walked up the soft aisle rug with brisk short-legged strides, and came out into the light. His pale blue eyes blinked rapidly for a moment, his plump uncreased face set firmly in a smile of quiet benevolence; he covered himself with a small well-kept hat of black velvet, and set off toward the avenue. Eugene shrank back gently as the little man walked past him: that small priestly figure in black bore on him the awful accolade of his great Mistress, that smooth face had heard the unutterable, seen the unknowable. In this remote outpost of the mighty Church, he was the standard-bearer of the one true faith, the consecrate flesh of God.

"They don't get any pay," said George Graves sorrowfully.

"How do they live, then?" Eugene asked.

"Don't you worry!" said George Graves, with a knowing smile.

"They get all that's coming to them. He doesn't seem to be starving, does he?"

"No," said Eugene, "he doesn't."

"He lives on the fat of the land," said George Graves. "Wine at every meal. There are some rich Catholics in this town."

"Yes," said Eugene, "Frank Moriarty's got a pot full of money that he made selling licker."

"Don't let them hear you," said George Graves, with a surly laugh. "They've got a family tree and a coat of arms already."

"A beer-bottle rampant on a field of limburger cheese, gules," said Eugene.

"They're trying to get the Princess Madeleine into Society," said George Graves.

"Hell fire!" Eugene cried, grinning. "Let's let her in, if that's all she wants. We belong to the Younger Set, don't we?"

"You may," said George Graves, reeling with laughter, "but I don't. I wouldn't be caught dead with the little pimps."

"Mr. Eugene Gant was the host last night at a hot winnie roast given to members of the local Younger Set at Dixieland, the beautiful old ancestral mansion of his mother, Mrs. Eliza Gant."

George Graves staggered. "You oughtn't to say that 'Gene," he gasped. He shook his head reproachfully. "Your mother's a fine woman."

"During the course of the evening, the Honorable George Graves, the talented scion of one of our oldest and wealthiest families, the Chesterfield Graveses, ($10 a week and up), rendered a few appropriate selections on the jews-harp."

Pausing deliberately, George Graves wiped his streaming eyes, and blew his nose. In the windows of Bain's millinery store, a waxen nymph bore a confection of rakish plumes upon her false tresses, and extended her simpering fingers in elegant counterpoise. Hats For Milady. O that those lips had language.

At this moment, with a smooth friction of trotting rumps, the death-wagon of Rogers-Malone turned swiftly in from the avenue, and wheeled by on ringing hoofs. They turned curiously and watched it draw up to the curb.

"Another Redskin bit the dust," said George Graves.

Come, delicate death, serenely arriving, arriving.

"Horse" Hines came out quickly on long flapping legs, and opened the doors behind. In another moment, with the help of the two men on the driver's seat, he had lowered the long wicker basket gently, and vanished, quietly, gravely, into the fragrant gloom of his establishment.

As Eugene watched, the old fatality of place returned. Each day, he thought, we pass the spot where some day we must die; or shall I, too, ride dead to some mean building yet unknown? Shall this bright clay, the hill-bound, die in lodgings yet unbuilt? Shall these eyes, drenched with visions yet unseen, stored with the viscous and interminable seas at dawn, with the sad comfort of unfulfilled Arcadias, seal up their cold dead dreams upon a tick, as this, in time, in some hot village of the plains?

He caught and fixed the instant. A telegraph messenger wheeled vigorously in from the avenue with pumping feet, curved widely into the alley at his right, jerking his wheel up sharply as he took the curb, and coasted down to the delivery boy's entrance. And post o'er land and ocean without rest. Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour.

Descending the dark stairs of the Medical Building slowly, Mrs. Thomas Hewitt, the comely wife of the prominent attorney (of Arthur, Hewitt, and Grey), turned out into the light, and advanced slowly toward the avenue. She was greeted with flourishing gestures of the hat by Henry T. Merriman (Merriman and Merriman), and Judge Robert C. Allan, professional colleagues of her husband. She smiled and shot each quickly with a glance. Pleasant is this flesh. When she had passed they looked after her a moment. Then they continued their discussion of the courts.

On the third floor of the First National Bank building on the right hand corner, Fergus Paston, fifty-six, a thin lecherous mouth between iron-gray dundrearies, leaned his cocked leg upon his open window, and followed the movements of Miss Bernie Powers, twenty-two, crossing the street. Even in our ashes live their wonted fires.

On the opposite corner, Mrs. Roland Rawls, whose husband was manager of the Peerless Pulp Company (Plant No. 3), and whose father owned it, emerged from the rich seclusion of Arthur N. Wright, jeweller. She clasped her silver mesh-bag, and stepped into her attendant Packard. She was a tall black-haired woman of thirty-three with a good figure: her face was dull, flat, and Mid-western.

"She's the one with the money," said George Graves. "He hasn't a damn thing. It's all in her name. She wants to be an opera singer."

"Can she sing?"

"Not worth a damn," said George Graves. "I've heard her. There's your chance, 'Gene. She's got a daughter about your age."

"What does she do?" said Eugene.

"She wants to be an actress," said George Graves, laughing throatily.

"You have to work too damn hard for your money," said Eugene.

They had reached the corner by the Bank, and now halted, indecisively, looking up the cool gulch of afternoon. The street buzzed with a light gay swarm of idlers: the faces of the virgins bloomed in and out like petals on a bough. Advancing upon him, an inch to the second, Eugene saw, ten feet away, the heavy paralyzed body of old Mr. Avery. He was a very great scholar, stone-deaf, and seventy-eight years old. He lived alone in a room above the Public Library. He had neither friends nor connections. He was a myth.

"Oh, my God!" said Eugene. "Here he comes!"

It was too late for escape.

Gasping a welcome, Mr. Avery bore down on him, with a violent shuffle of his feet and a palsied tattoo of his heavy stick which brought him over the intervening three yards in forty seconds.

"Well, young fellow," he panted, "how's Latin?"

"Fine," Eugene screamed into his pink ear.

"Poeta nascitur, non fit," said Mr. Avery, and went off into a silent wheeze of laughter which brought on a fit of coughing strangulation. His eyes bulged, his tender pink skin grew crimson, he roared his terror out in a phlegmy rattle, while his goose-white hand trembled frantically for his handkerchief. A crowd gathered. Eugene quickly drew a dirty handkerchief from the old man's pocket, and thrust it into his hands. He tore up from his convulsed organs a rotting mass, and panted rapidly for breath. The crowd dispersed somewhat dejectedly.

George Graves grinned darkly. "That's too bad," he said. "You oughtn't to laugh, 'Gene." He turned away, gurgling.

"Can you conjugate?" gasped Mr. Avery. "Here's the way I learned:

"Amo, amas,
I love a lass.
Amat,
He loves her, too."

Quivering with tremors of laughter, he launched himself again. Because he could not leave them, save by the inch, they moved off several yards to the curb. Grow old along with me!

"That's a damn shame," said George Graves, looking after him and shaking his head. "Where's he going?"

"To supper," said Eugene.

"To supper!" said George Graves. "It's only four o'clock. Where does he eat?"

Not where he eats, but where he is eaten.

"At the Uneeda," said Eugene, beginning to choke. "It takes him two hours to get there."

"Does he go every day?" said George Graves. beginning to laugh.

"Three times a day," Eugene screamed. "He spends all morning going to dinner, and all afternoon going to supper."

A whisper of laughter came from their weary jaws. They sighed like sedge.

At this moment, dodging briskly through the crowd, with a loud and cheerful word for every one, Mr. Joseph Bailey, secretary of the Altamont Chamber of Commerce, short, broad, and ruddy, came by them with a hearty gesture of the hand:

"Hello, boys!" he cried. "How're they going?" But before either of them could answer, he had passed on, with an encouraging shake of his head, and a deep applauding "*That's* right."

"*What's* right?" said Eugene.

But before George Graves could answer, the great lung specialist, Dr. Fairfax Grinder, scion of one of the oldest and proudest families in Virginia, drove in viciously from Church Street, with his sinewy length of six feet and eight inches coiled tensely in the deep pit of his big Buick roadster. Cursing generally the whole crawling itch of Confederate and Yankee postwar rabbledom, with a few special parentheses for Jews and niggers, he drove full tilt at the short plump figure of Joe Zamschnick, men's furnishings ("Just a Whisper Off The Square").

Joseph, two yards away from legal safety, hurled himself with a wild scream headlong at the curb. He arrived on hand and knees, but under his own power.

"K-hurses!" said Eugene. "Foiled again."

'Twas true! Dr. Fairfax Grinder's lean bristled upper lip drew back over his strong yellow teeth. He jammed on his brakes, and lifted his car round with a complete revolution of his long arms. Then he roared away through scattering traffic, in a greasy blue cloud of gasoline and burnt rubber.

Joe Zamschnick frantically wiped his gleaming bald head with a silk handkerchief and called loudly on the public to bear witness.

"What's the matter with him?" said George Graves, disappointed. "He usually goes up on the sidewalk after them if he can't get them on the street."

On the other side of the street, attracting no more than a languid stare from the loafing natives, the Honorable William Jennings Bryan paused benevolently before the windows of the H. Martin Grimes Bookstore, allowing the frisking breeze to toy pleasantly with his famous locks. The tangles of Neæra's hair.

The Commoner stared carefully at the window display which included several copies of *Before Adam,* by Jack London. Then he entered, and selected a dozen views of Altamont and the surrounding hills.

"He may come here to live," said George Graves. "Dr. Doak's offered to give him a house and lot in Doak Park."

"Why?" said Eugene.

"Because the advertising will be worth a lot to the town," said George Graves.

A little before them, that undaunted daughter of desires, Miss Elizabeth Scragg, emerged from Woolworth's Five and Ten Cent Store, and turned up toward the Square. Smiling, she acknowledged the ponderous salute of Big Jeff White, the giant half-owner of the Whitstone hotel, whose fortunes had begun when he had refused to return to his old comrade, Dickson Reese, the embezzling cashier, ninety thousand dollars of entrusted loot. Dog eat dog. Thief catch thief. It is not growing like a tree, in bulk doth make man better be.

His six-and-a-half-foot shadow flitted slowly before them. He passed, in creaking number twelves, a massive smooth-jowled man with a great paunch girdled in a wide belt.

Across the street again, before the windows of the Van W. Yeats Shoe Company, the Reverend J. Brooks Gall, Amherst ('61), and as loyal a Deke as ever breathed, but looking only sixty of his seventy-three years, paused in his brisk walk, and engaged in sprightly monologue, three of his fellow Boy Scouts —the Messrs. Lewis Monk, seventeen, Bruce Rogers, thirteen, and Malcolm Hodges, fourteen. None knew as well as he the heart of a boy. He, too, it seems, had once been one himself. Thus, as one bright anecdote succeeded, or suggested, a half-dozen others, they smiled dutifully, with attentive respect, below the lifted barrier of his bristly white mustache, into the gleaming rhyme of his false teeth. And, with rough but affectionate camaraderie, he would pause from time to time to say: "Old Malc!" or "Old Bruce!", gripping firmly his listener's arm, shaking him gently. Pallidly, on restless feet, they smiled, plotting escape with slant-eyed stealth.

Mr. Buse, the Oriental rug merchant, came around the corner below them from Liberty Street. His broad dark face was wreathed in Persian smiles. I met a traveller from an antique land.

In the Bijou Cafe for Ladies and Gents, Mike, the counter man, leaned his hairy arms upon the marble slab, and bent his wrinkled inch of brow upon a week-old copy of *Atlantis*. Fride Chicken To-day with Swet Potatos. Hail to thee, blithe spirit, bird thou never wert. A solitary fly darted swiftly about the greasy cover of a glass humidor, under which a leathery quarter of mince pie lay weltering. Spring had come.

Meanwhile, having completed twice their parade up and down the street from the Square to the post-office, the Misses Christine Ball, Viola Powell, Aline Rollins, and Dorothy Hazzard were accosted outside Wood's Drug Store by Tom French, seventeen, Roy Duncan, nineteen, and Carl Jones, eighteen.

"Where do you think you're going?" said Tom French, insolently.

Gayly, brightly, in unison, they answered:

"Hey—ee!"

"Hay's seven dollars a ton," said Roy Duncan, and immediately burst into a high cackle of laughter, in which all the others joined, merrily.

"You craz-ee!" said Viola Powell tenderly. Tell me, ye merchants' daughters, did ye see another creature fair and wise as she.

"Mr. Duncan," said Tom French, turning his proud ominous face upon his best friend, "I want you to meet a friend of mine, Miss Rollins."

"I think I've met this man somewhere before," said Aline Rollins. Another Splendor on his mouth alit.

"Yes," said Roy Duncan, "I go there often."

His small tight freckled impish face was creased again by his high cackle. All I could never be. They moved into the store, where drouthy neibors neibors meet, through the idling group of fountain gallants.

Mr. Henry Sorrell (It Can Be Done), and Mr. John T. Howland (We Sell Lots and Lots of Lots), emerged, beyond Arthur N. Wright's, jeweller, from the gloomy dusk of the Gruner Building. Each looked into the subdivisions of the other's heart; their eyes kept the great Vision of the guarded mount as swiftly they turned into Church Street where Sorrell's Hudson was parked.

White-vested, a trifle paunchy, with large broad feet, a shaven moon of red face, and abundant taffy-colored hair, the Reverend John Smallwood, pastor of the First Baptist Church, walked heavily up the street, greeting his parishioners warmly, and hoping to see his Pilot face to face. Instead, however, he encountered the Honorable William Jennings Bryan, who was coming slowly out of the bookstore. The two close friends greeted each other affectionately, and, with a firm friendly laying on of hands, gave each to each the Christian aid of a benevolent exorcism.

"Just the man I was looking for," said Brother Smallwood. In silence, slowly, they shook hands for several seconds. Silence was pleased.

"That," observed the Commoner with grave humor, "is what I thought the Great American People said to me on three occasions." It was a favorite jest—ripe with wisdom, mellowed by the years, yet, withal, so characteristic of the man. The deep furrows of his mouth widened in a smile. Our master—famous, calm, and dead.

Passed, on catspaw rubber tread, from the long dark bookstore, Professor L. B. Dunn, principal of Graded School No. 3, Montgomery Avenue. He smiled coldly at them with a gimlet narrowing of his spectacled eyes. The tell-tale cover of *The New Republic* peeked from his pocket. Clamped under his lean and freckled arm were new library copies of *The Great Illusion*, by Norman Angell, and *The Ancient Grudge*, by Owen Wister. A lifelong advocate of a union of the two great English-speaking (sic) nations, making together irresistibly for peace, truth, and righteousness in a benevolent but firm authority over the less responsible elements of civilization, he passed, the Catholic man, pleasantly dedicated to the brave adventuring of minds and the salvaging of mankind. Ah, yes!

"And how are you and the Good Woman enjoying your sojourn in the Land of the Sky?" said the Reverend John Smallwood.

"Our only regret," said the Commoner, "is that our visit here must be measured by days and not by months. Nay, by years."

Mr. Richard Gorman, twenty-six, city reporter of *The Citizen*, strode rapidly up the street, with proud cold news-nose lifted. His complacent smile, hard-lipped, loosened into servility.

"Ah, there, Dick," said John Smallwood, clasping his hand affectionately, and squeezing his arm, "Just the man I was looking for. Do you know Mr. Bryan?"

"As fellow newspaper men," said the Commoner, "Dick and I have been close friends for—how many years is it, my boy?"

"Three, I think, sir," said Mr. Gorman, blushing prettily.

"I wish you could have been here, Dick," said the Reverend Smallwood, "to hear what Mr. Bryan was saying about us. The good people of this town would be mighty proud to hear it."

"I'd like another statement from you before you go, Mr. Bryan," said Richard Gorman. "There's a story going the rounds that you may make your home with us in the future."

When questioned by a *Citizen* reporter, Mr. Bryan refused either to confirm or deny the rumor:

"I may have a statement to make later," he observed with a significant smile, "but at present I must content myself by saying that if I could have chosen the place of my birth, I could not have found a fairer spot than this wonderland of nature."

Earthly Paradise, Thinks Commoner.

"I have travelled far in my day," continued the man who had been chosen three times by a great Party to contend for the highest honor within the gift of the people. "I have gone from the woods of Maine to the wave-washed sands of Florida, from Hatteras to Halifax, and from the summits of the Rockies to where Missouri rolls her turgid flood, but I have seen few spots that equal, and none that surpass, the beauty of this mountain Eden."

The reporter made notes rapidly.

The years of his glory washed back to him upon the rolling tides of rhetoric—the great lost days of the first crusade when the money barons trembled beneath the shadow of the Cross of Gold, and Bryan! Bryan! Bryan! Bryan! burned through the land like a comet. Ere I was old. 1896. Ah, woful *ere,* which tells me youth's no longer here.

Foresees Dawn of New Era.

When pressed more closely by the reporter as to his future plans, Mr. Bryan replied:

"My schedule is completely filled, for months to come, with speaking engagements that will take me from one end of the country to the other, in the fight I am making for the reduction of the vast armaments that form the chief obstacle to the reign of peace on earth, good-will to men. After that, who knows?" he said, flashing his famous smile. "Perhaps I shall come back to this beautiful region, and take up my life among my good friends here as one who, having fought the good fight, deserves to spend the declining years of his life not only within sight, but within the actual boundaries, of the happy land of Canaan."

Asked if he could predict with any certainty the date of his proposed retirement, the Commoner answered characteristically with the following beautiful quotation from Longfellow:

"When the war-drum throbbed no longer,
And the battle-flags were furled
In the Parliament of man,
The Federation of the world."

The magic cell of music—the electric piano in the shallow tiled lobby of Altamont's favorite cinema, the Ajax, stopped playing with firm, tinny abruptness, hummed ominously for a moment, and without warning commenced anew. It's a long way to Tipperary. The world shook with the stamp of marching men.

Miss Margaret Blanchard and Mrs. C. M. McReady, the druggist's drugged wife who, by the white pitted fabric of her skin, and the wide bright somnolence of her eyes, on honey-dew had fed too often, came out of the theatre and turned down toward Wood's pharmacy.

To-day: Maurice Costello and Edith M. Storey in *Throw Out the Life-line,* a Vitagraph Release.

Goggling, his great idiot's head lolling on his scrawny neck, wearing the wide-rimmed straw hat that covered him winter and summer, Willie Goff, the pencil merchant, jerked past, with inward lunges of his crippled right foot. The fingers of his withered arm pointed stiffly toward himself, beckoning to him, and touching him as he walked with stiff jerking taps, in a terrible parody of vanity. A gaudy handkerchief with blue, yellow and crimson patterns hung in a riotous blot from his breast-pocket over his neatly belted gray Norfolk jacket, a wide loose collar of silk barred with red and orange stripes flowered across his narrow shoulders. In his lapel a huge red carnation. His thin face, beneath the jutting globular head, grinned constantly, glutting his features with wide, lapping, receding, returning, idiot smiles. For should he live a thousand years, he never will be out of humor. He burred ecstatically at the passers-by, who grinned fondly at him, and continued down to Wood's where he was greeted with loud cheers and laughter by a group of young men who loitered at the fountain's end. They gathered around him boisterously, pounding his back and drawing him up to the fountain. Pleased, he looked at them warmly, gratefully. He was touched and happy.

"What're you having, Willie?" said Mr. Tobias Pottle.

"Give me a dope," said Willie Goff to the grinning jerker, "a dope and lime."

Pudge Carr, the politician's son, laughed hilariously. "Want a dope and lime, do you, Willie?" he said, and struck him heavily on the back. His thick stupid face composed itself.

"Have a cigarette, Willie," he said, offering the package to Willie Goff.

"What's yours?" said the jerker to Toby Pottle.

"Give me a dope, too."

"I don't want anything," said Pudge Carr. Such drinks as made them nobly wild, not mad.

Pudge Carr held a lighted match to Willie's cigarette, winking slowly at Brady Chalmers, a tall, handsome fellow, with black hair, and a long dark face. Willie Goff drew in on his cigarette, lighting it with dry smacking lips. He coughed, removed the weed, and held it awkwardly between his thumb and forefinger, looking at it, curiously.

They sputtered with laughter, involved and lost in clouds of fume, and guzzling deep, the boor, the lackey, and the groom.

Brady Chalmers took Willie's colored handkerchief gently from his pocket and held it up for their inspection. Then he folded it carefully and put it back.

"What are you all dressed up about, Willie?" he said. "You must be going to see your girl."

Willie Goff grinned cunningly.

Toby Pottle blew a luxurious jet of smoke through his nostrils. He was twenty-four, carefully groomed, with slick blond hair, and a pink massaged face.

"Come on, Willie," he said, blandly, quietly, "you've got a girl, haven't you?"

Willie Goff leered knowingly; at the counter-end, Tim McCall, twenty-eight, who had been slowly feeding cracked ice from his cupped fist into his bloated whisky-fierce jowls, collapsed suddenly, blowing a bright rattling hail upon the marble ledge.

"I've got several," said Willie Goff. "A fellow's got to have a little Poon-Tang, hasn't he?"

Flushed with high ringing laughter, they smiled, spoke respectfully, uncovered before Miss Tot Webster, Miss Mary McGraw, and Miss Martha Cotton, older members of the Younger Set. They called for stronger music, louder wine.

"How do you do?"

"Aha! Aha!" said Brady Chalmers to Miss Mary McGraw. "Where were *you* that time?"

"You'll never know," she called back. It was between them—their little secret. They laughed knowingly with joy of possession.

"Come on back, Pudge," said Euston Phipps, their escort. "You too, Brady." He followed the ladies back—tall, bold, swagger—a young alcoholic with one sound lung. He was a good golfer.

Pert boys rushed from the crowded booths and tables to the fountain, coming up with a long slide. They shouted their orders rudely, nagging the swift jerkers glibly, stridently.

"All right, son. Two dopes and a mint limeade. Make it snappy."

"Do you work around here, boy?"

The jerkers moved in ragtime tempo, juggling the drinks, tossing scooped globes of ice-cream into the air and catching them in glasses, beating swift rhythms with a spoon.

Seated alone, with thick brown eyes above her straw regardant, Mrs. Thelma Jarvis, the milliner, drew, in one swizzling guzzle, the last beaded chain of linked sweetness long drawn out from the bottom of her glass. Drink to me only with thine eyes. She rose slowly, looking into the mirror of her open purse. Then, fluescent, her ripe limbs moulded in a dress of silk henna, she writhed carefully among the crowded tables, with a low rich murmur of contrition. Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low—an excellent thing in a woman. The high light chatter of the tables dropped as she went by. For God's sake, hold your tongue and let me love! On amber undulant limbs she walked slowly up the aisle past perfume, stationery, rubber goods, and toilet preparations, pausing at the cigar counter to pay her check. Her round, melon-heavy breasts nodded their heads in slow but sprightly dance. A poet could not but be gay, in such a jocund company.

But—at the entrance, standing in the alcove by the magazine rack, Mr. Paul Goodson, of the Dependable Life, closed his long grinning dish-face abruptly, and ceased talking. He doffed his hat without effusiveness, as did his companion, Coston

Smathers, the furniture man (you furnish the girl, we furnish the house). They were both Baptists.

Mrs. Thelma Jarvis turned her warm ivory stare upon them, parted her full small mouth in a remote smile, and passed, ambulant. When she had gone they turned to each other, grinning quietly. We'll be waiting at the river. Swiftly they glanced about them. No one had seen.

Patroness of all the arts, but particular sponsor for Music, Heavenly Maid, Mrs. Franz Wilhelm Von Zeck, wife of the noted lung specialist, and the discoverer of Von Zeck's serum, came imperially from the doors of the Fashion Mart, and was handed tenderly into the receiving cushions of her Cadillac by Mr. Louis Rosalsky. Benevolently but distantly she smiled down upon him: the white parchment of his hard Polish face was broken by a grin of cruel servility curving up around the wings of his immense putty-colored nose. Frau Von Zeck settled her powerful chins upon the coarse shelving of her Wagnerian breasts and, her ponderous gaze already dreaming on remote philanthropies, was charioted smoothly away from the devoted tradesman. *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, weiss was Ich leide.*

Mr. Rosalsky returned into his store.

For the third time the Misses Mildred Shuford, Helen Pendergast, and Mary Catherine Bruce drove by, clustered together like unpicked cherries in the front seat of Miss Shuford's Reo. They passed, searching the pavements with eager, haughty eyes, pleased at their proud appearance. They turned up Liberty Street on their fourth swing round the circle. Waltz me around again, Willie.

"Do you know how to dance, George?" Eugene asked. His heart was full of bitter pride and fear.

"Yes," said George Graves absently, "a little bit. I don't like it." He lifted his brooding eyes.

"Say, 'Gene," he said, "how much do you think Dr. Von Zeck is worth?"

He answered Eugene's laughter with a puzzled sheepish grin.

"Come on," said Eugene. "I'll match you for a drink."

They dodged nimbly across the narrow street, amid the thickening afternoon traffic.

"It's getting worse all the time," said George Graves. "The people who laid the town out didn't have any vision. What's it going to be like, ten years from now?"

"They could widen the streets, couldn't they?" said Eugene.

"No. Not now. You'd have to move all the buildings back. Wonder how much it would cost?" said George Graves thoughtfully.

"And if we don't," Professor L. B. Dunn's precise voice sounded its cold warning, "their next move will be directed against us. You may yet live to see the day when the iron heel of militarism is on your neck, and the armed forces of the Kaiser do the goose-step up and down this street. When that day comes ——"

"I don't put any stock in those stories," said Mr. Bob Webster rudely and irreverently. He was a small man, with a gray, mean face, violent and bitter. A chronic intestinal sourness seemed to have left its print upon his features. "In my opinion, it's all propaganda. Those Germans are too damn good for them, that's all. They're beginning to call for calf-rope."

"When that day comes," Professor Dunn implacably continued, "remember what I told you. The German government has imperialistic designs upon the whole of the world. It is looking to the day when it shall have all mankind under the yoke of Krupp and Kultur. The fate of civilization is hanging in the balance. Mankind is at the crossroads. I pray God it shall not be said that we were found wanting. I pray God that this free people may never suffer as little Belgium suffered, that our wives and daughters may not be led off into slavery or shame, our children maimed and slaughtered."

"It's not our fight," said Mr. Bob Webster. "I don't want to send my boys three thousand miles across the sea to get shot for those foreigners. If they come over here, I'll shoulder a gun with the best of them, but until they do they can fight it out among themselves. Isn't that right, Judge?" he said, turning toward the party of the third part, Judge Walter C. Jeter, of the Federal Circuit, who had fortunately been a close friend of Grover Cleveland. Ancestral voices prophesying war.

"Did you know the Wheeler boys?" Eugene asked George Graves. "Paul and Clifton?"

"Yes," said George Graves. "They went away and joined the French army. They're in the Foreign Legion."

"They're in the aviation part of it," said Eugene. "The Lafayette Esky-drill. Clifton Wheeler has shot down more than six Germans."

"The boys around here didn't like him," said George Graves. "They thought he was a sissy."

Eugene winced slightly at the sound of the word.

"How old was he?" he asked.

"He was a grown man," said George. "Twenty-two or three."

Disappointed, Eugene considered his chance of glory. (*Ich bin ja noch ein Kind.*)

"—But fortunately," continued Judge Walter C. Jeter deliberately, "we have a man in the White House on whose far-seeing statesmanship we can safely rely. Let us trust to the wisdom of his leadership, obeying, in word and spirit, the principles of strict neutrality, accepting only as a last resort a course that would lead this great nation again into the suffering and tragedy of war, which," his voice sank to a whisper, "God forbid!"

Thinking of a more ancient war, in which he had borne himself gallantly, Colonel James Buchanan Pettigrew, head of the Pettigrew Military Academy (Est. 1789), rode by in his open victoria, behind an old negro driver and two well-nourished brown mares. There was a good brown smell of horse and sweat-cured leather. The old negro snaked his whip gently across the sleek trotting rumps, growling softly.

Colonel Pettigrew was wrapped to his waist in a heavy rug, his shoulders were covered with a gray Confederate cape. He bent forward, leaning his old weight upon a heavy polished stick, which his freckled hands gripped upon the silver knob. Muttering, his proud powerful old head turned shakily from side to side, darting fierce splintered glances at the drifting crowd. He was a very parfit gentil knight.

He muttered.

"Suh?" said the negro, pulling in on his reins, and turning around.

"Go on! Go on, you scoundrel!" said Colonel Pettigrew.

"Yes, suh," said the negro. They drove on.

In the crowd of loafing youngsters that stood across the threshold of Wood's pharmacy, Colonel Pettigrew's darting eyes saw two of his own cadets. They were pimply youths, with slack jaws and a sloppy carriage.

He muttered his disgust. Not the same! Not the same! Nothing the same! In his proud youth, in the only war that mattered, Colonel Pettigrew had marched at the head of his own cadets. There were 117, sir, all under nineteen. They stepped forward to a man . . . until not a single commissioned officer was left . . . 36 came back . . . since 1789 . . . it must go on! . . . 19, sir—all under one hundred and seventeen . . . must . . . go . . . on!

His sagging cheek-flanks trembled gently. The horses trotted out of sight around the corner, with a smooth-spoked rumble of rubber tires.

George Graves and Eugene entered Wood's pharmacy and stood up to the counter. The elder soda-jerker, scowling, drew a sopping rag across a puddle of slop upon the marble slab.

"What's yours?" he said irritably.

"I want a chock-lut milk," said Eugene.

"Make it two," added George Graves.

O for a draught of vintage that hath been cooled a long age in the deep-delvèd earth!

XXV

Yes. The enormous crime had been committed. And, for almost a year, Eugene had been maintaining a desperate neutrality. His heart, however, was not neutral. The fate of civilization, it appeared, hung in the balance.

The war had begun at the peak of the summer season. Dixieland was full. His closest friend at the time was a sharp old spinstress with frayed nerves, who had been for thirty years a teacher of English in a New York City public school. Day by day, after the murder of the Grand Duke, they watched the tides of blood and desolation mount through the world. Miss Crane's thin red nostrils quivered with indignation. Her old gray eyes were sharp with anger. The idea! The idea!

For, of all the English, none can show a loftier or more inspired love for Albion's Isle than American ladies who teach its noble tongue.

Eugene was also faithful. With Miss Crane he kept a face of mournful regret, but his heart drummed a martial tattoo against his ribs. The air was full of fifes and flutes; he heard the ghostly throbbing of great guns.

"We must be fair!" said Margaret Leonard. "We must be fair!" But her eyes darkened when she read the news of England's entry, and her throat was trembling like a bird's. When she looked up her eyes were wet.

"Ah, Lord!" she said. "You'll see things now."

"Little Bobs!" roared Sheba.

"God bless him! Did you see where he's going to take the field?"

John Dorsey Leonard laid down the paper, and bent over with high drooling laughter.

"Lord a'mercy!" he gasped. "Let the rascals come now!"

Ah, well—they came.

All through that waning summer, Eugene shuttled frantically from the school to Dixieland, unable, in the delirium of promised glory, to curb his prancing limbs. He devoured every scrap of news, and rushed to share it with the Leonards or Miss Crane. He read every paper he could lay his hands on, exulting in the defeats that were forcing the Germans back at every point. For, he gathered from this wilderness of print, things were going badly with the Huns. At a thousand points they fled squealing before English steel at Mons, fell suppliantly before the French charge along the Marne; withdrew here, gave way there, ran away elsewhere. Then, one morning, when they should have been at Cologne, they were lined up at the walls of Paris. They had run in the wrong direction. The world grew dark. Desperately, he tried to understand. He could not. By the extraordinary strategy of always retreating, the German army had arrived before Paris. It was something new in warfare. It was several years, in fact, before Eugene could wholly understand that some one in the German armies had done some fighting.

John Dorsey Leonard was untroubled.

"You wait!" he said confidently. "You just wait, my sonny. That old fellow Joffer knows what he's about. This is just what he's been waiting for. Now he's got them where he wants them."

Eugene wondered for what subtle reason a French general might want a German army at Paris.

Margaret lifted her troubled eyes from the paper.

"It looks mighty serious," she said. "I tell you!" She was silent a moment, a torrent of passion rose up in her throat. Then she added in a low trembling voice: "If England goes, we all go."

"God bless her!" Sheba yelled.

"God bless her, 'Gene," she continued, tapping him on the knee. "When I stepped ashore on her dear old soil that time, I just couldn't help myself. I didn't care what any one thought. I knelt right down there in the dirt, and pretended to tie my shoe, but say, boy"—her bleared eyes glistened through her tears—"God bless her, I couldn't help it. Do you know what I did? I leaned over and kissed her earth." Large gummy tears rolled down her red cheeks. She was weeping loudly, but she went on. "I said: This is the earth of Shakespeare, and Milton, and John Keats and, by God, what's more, it's mine as well! God bless her! God bless her!"

Tears flowed quietly from Margaret Leonard's eyes. Her face was wet. She could not speak. They were all deeply moved.

"She won't go," said John Dorsey Leonard. "We'll have a word to say to that! She won't go! You wait!"

In Eugene's fantasy there burned the fixed vision of the great hands clasped across the sea, the flowering of green fields, and the developing convolutions of a faery London—mighty, elfin, old, a romantic labyrinth of ancient crowded ways, tall, leaning houses, Lucullan food and drink, and the mad imperial eyes of genius burning among the swarm of quaint originality.

As the war developed, and the literature of war-enchantment began to appear, Margaret Leonard gave him book after book to read. They were the books of the young men—the young men who fought to blot out the evil of the world with their blood. In her trembling voice she read to him Rupert Brooke's sonnet—"If I should die, think only this of me"—and she put a copy of Donald Hankey's *A Student in Arms* into his hand, saying:

"Read this, boy. It will stir you as you've never been stirred before. Those boys have seen the vision!"

He read it. He read many others. He saw the vision. He became a member of this legion of chivalry—young Galahad-Eugene—a spearhead of righteousness. He had gone a-Grailing. He composed dozens of personal memoirs, into which quietly, humorously, with fine-tempered English restraint, he poured the full measure of his pure crusading heart. Sometimes, he came through to the piping times of peace minus an arm, a leg, or an eye, diminished but ennobled; sometimes his last radiant words were penned on the eve of the attack that took his life. With glistening eyes, he read his own epilogue, enjoyed his post-mortem glory, as his last words were recorded and explained by his editor. Then, witness of his own martyrdom, he dropped two smoking tears upon his young slain body. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*

Ben loped along, scowling, by Wood's pharmacy. As he passed the idling group at the tiled entrance, he cast on them a look of sudden fierce contempt. Then he laughed quietly, savagely.

"Oh, my God!" he said.

At the corner, scowling, he waited for Mrs. Pert to cross from the Post Office. She came over slowly, reeling.

Having arranged to meet her later in the pharmacy, he crossed over, and turned angularly down Federal Street behind the Post Office. At the second entrance to the Doctors' and Surgeons' Building, he turned in, and began to mount the dark creaking stairs. Somewhere, with punctual developing monotony, a single drop of water was falling into the wet black basin of a sink. He paused in the wide corridor of the first floor to control the nervous thudding of his heart. Then he walked half-way down and entered the waiting-room of Dr. J. H. Coker. It was vacant. Frowning, he sniffed the air. The whole building was sharp with the clean nervous odor of antiseptics. A litter of magazines—*Life, Judge, The Literary Digest,* and *The American*—on the black mission table, told its story of weary and distressed fumbling. The inner door opened and the doctor's assistant, Miss Ray, came out. She had on her hat. She was ready to depart.

"Do you want to see the doctor?" she asked.

"Yes," said Ben, "is he busy?"

"Come on in, Ben," said Coker, coming to the door. He took his long wet cigar from his mouth, grinning yellowly. "That's all for to-day, Laura. You can go."

"Good-bye," said Miss Laura Ray, departing.

Ben went into Coker's office. Coker closed the door and sat down at his untidy desk.

"You'll be more comfortable if you lie down on that table," he said grinning.

Ben gave the doctor's table a look of nausea.

"How many have died on that thing?" he asked. He sat down nervously in a chair by the desk, and lighted a cigarette, holding the flame to the charred end of cigar Coker thrust forward.

"Well, what can I do for you, son?" he asked.

"I'm tired of pushing daisies here," said Ben. "I want to push them somewhere else."

"What do you mean, Ben?"

"I suppose you've heard, Coker," said Ben quietly and insultingly, "that there's a war going on in Europe. That is, if you've learned to read the papers."

"No, I hadn't heard about it, son," said Coker, puffing slowly and deeply. "I read a paper—the one that comes out in the morning. I suppose they haven't got the news yet." He grinned maliciously. "What do you want, Ben?"

"I'm thinking of going to Canada and enlisting," said Ben. "I want you to tell me if I can get in."

Coker was silent a moment. He took the long chewed weed from his mouth and looked at it thoughtfully.

"What do you want to do that for, Ben?" he said.

Ben got up suddenly, and went to the window. He cast his cigarette away into the court. It struck the cement well with a small dry plop. When he turned around, his sallow face had gone white and passionate.

"In Christ's name, Coker," he said, "what's it all about? Are you able to tell me? What in heaven's name are we here for? You're a doctor—you ought to know something."

Coker continued to look at his cigar. It had gone out again.

"Why?" he said deliberately. "Why should I know anything?"

"Where do we come from? Where do we go to? What are we here for? What the hell is it all about?" Ben cried out furiously in a rising voice. He turned bitterly, accusingly, on the older man. "For God's sake, speak up, Coker. Don't sit there like a damned tailor's dummy. Say something, won't you?"

"What do you want me to say?" said Coker. "What am I? A mind-reader? A spiritualist? I'm your physician, not your priest. I've seen them born, and I've seen them die. What happens to them before or after, I can't say."

"Damn that!" said Ben. "What happens to them in between?"

"You're as great an authority on that as I am, Ben," said Coker. "What you want, son, is not a doctor, but a prophet."

"They come to you when they're sick, don't they?" said Ben.

"They all want to get well, don't they? You do your best to cure them, don't you?"

"No," said Coker. "Not always. But I'll grant that I'm supposed to. What of it?"

"You must all think that it's about something," said Ben, "or you wouldn't do it!"

"A man must live, mustn't he?" said Coker with a grin.

"That's what I'm asking you, Coker. Why must he?"

"Why," said Coker, "in order to work nine hours a day in a newspaper office, sleep nine hours, and enjoy the other six in washing, shaving, dressing, eating at the Greasy Spoon, loafing in front of Wood's, and occasionally taking the Merry Widow to see Francis X. Bushman. Isn't that reason enough for any man? If a man's hardworking and decent, and invests his money in the Building and Loan every week, instead of squandering it on cigarettes, coca-cola, and Kuppenheimer clothes, he may own a little home some day." Coker's voice sank to a hush of reverence. "He may even have his own car, Ben. Think of that! He can get in it, and ride, and ride, and ride. He can ride all over these damned mountains. He can be very, very happy. He can take exercise regularly in the Y. M. C. A. and think only clean thoughts. He can marry a good pure woman and have any number of fine sons and daughters, all of whom may be brought up in the Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian faiths. and given splendid courses in Economics, Commercial Law, and the Fine Arts, at the State university. There's plenty to live for, Ben. There's something to keep you busy every moment."

"You're a great wit, Coker," Ben said, scowling. "You're as funny as a crutch." He straightened his humped shoulders self-consciously, and filled his lungs with air.

"Well, what about it?" he asked, with a nervous grin. "Am I fit to go?"

"Let's see," said Coker deliberately, beginning to look him over. "Feet—pigeon-toed, but good arch." He looked at Ben's tan leathers closely.

"What's the matter, Coker?" said Ben. "Do you need your toes to shoot a gun with?"

"How're your teeth, son?"

Ben drew back his thin lips and showed two rows of hard white grinders. At the same moment, casually, swiftly, Coker prodded him with a strong yellow finger in the solar plexus. His distended chest collapsed; he bent over, laughing, and coughed dryly. Coker turned away to his desk and picked up his cigar.

"What's the matter, Coker?" said Ben. "What's the idea?"

"That's all, son. I'm through with you," said Coker.

"Well, what about it?" said Ben nervously.

"What about what?"

"Am I all right?"

"Certainly you're all right," said Coker. He turned with burning match. "Who said you weren't all right?"

Ben stared at him, scowling, with fear-bright eyes.

"Quit your kidding, Coker," he said. "I'm three times seven, you know. Am I fit to go?"

"What's the rush?" said Coker. "The war's not over yet. We may get into it before long. Why not wait a bit?"

"That means I'm not fit," said Ben. "What's the matter with me, Coker?"

"Nothing," said Coker carefully. "You're a bit thin. A little run down, aren't you, Ben? You need a little meat on those bones, son. You can't sit on a stool at the Greasy Spoon, with a cigarette in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other, and get fat."

"Am I all right or not, Coker?"

Coker's long death's-head widened in a yellow grin.

"Yes," he said. "You're all right, Ben. You're one of the most all right people I know."

Ben read the true answer in Coker's veined and weary eyes. His own were sick with fear. But he said bitingly:

"Thanks, Coker. You're a lot of help. I appreciate what you've done a lot. As a doctor, you're a fine first baseman."

Coker grinned. Ben left the office.

As he went out on the street he met Harry Tugman going down to the paper office.

"What's the matter, Ben?" said Harry Tugman. "Feeling sick?"

"Yes," said Ben, scowling at him. "I've just had a shot of 606."

He went up the street to meet Mrs. Pert.

XXVI

In the autumn, at the beginning of his fifteenth year—his last year at Leonard's—Eugene went to Charleston on a short excursion. He found a substitute for his paper route.

"Come on!" said Max Isaacs, whom he still occasionally saw. "We're going to have a good time, son."

"Yeah, man!" said Malvin Bowden, whose mother was conducting the tour. "You can still git beer in Charleston," he added with a dissipated leer.

"You can go swimmin' in the ocean at the Isle of Palms," said Max Isaacs. Then, reverently, he added: "You can go to the Navy Yard an' see the ships."

He was waiting until he should be old enough to join the navy. He read the posters greedily. He knew all the navy men at the enlistment office. He had read all the booklets—he was deep in naval lore. He knew to a dollar the earnings of firemen, second class, of radio men, and of all kinds of C. P. O.'s.

His father was a plumber. He did not want to be a plumber. He wanted to join the navy and see the world. In the navy, a man was given good pay and a good education. He learned a trade. He got good food and good clothing. It was all given to him free, for nothing.

"H'm!" said Eliza, with a bantering smile. "Why, say, boy, what do you want to do that for? You're my baby!"

It had been years since he was. She smiled tremulously.

"Yes'm," said Eugene. "Can I go? It's only for five days. I've got the money." He thrust his hand into his pocket, feeling.

"I tell you what!" said Eliza, working her lips, smiling. "You may wish you had that money before this winter's over. You're going to need new shoes and a warm overcoat when the cold weather comes. You must be mighty rich. I wish I could afford to go running off on a trip like that."

"Oh, my God!" said Ben, with a short laugh. He tossed his cigarette into one of the first fires of the year.

"I want to tell you, son," said Eliza, becoming grave, "you've got to learn the value of a dollar or you'll never have a roof to call your own. I want you to have a good time, boy, but you mustn't squander your money."

"Yes'm," said Eugene.

"For heaven's sake!" Ben cried. "It's the kid's own money. Let him do what he likes with it. If he wants to throw it out the damned window, it's his own business."

She clasped her hands thoughtfully upon her waist and stared away, pursing her lips.

"Well, I reckon it'll be all right," she said. "Mrs. Bowden will take good care of you."

It was his first journey to a strange place alone. Eliza packed an old valise carefully, and stowed away a box of sandwiches and eggs. He went away at night. As he stood by his valise, washed, brushed, excited, she wept a little. He was again, she felt, a little farther off. The hunger for voyages was in his face.

"Be a good boy," she said. "Don't get into any trouble down there." She thought carefully a moment, looking away. Then she went down in her stocking, and pulled out a five-dollar bill.

"Don't waste your money," she said. "Here's a little extra. You may need it."

"Come here, you little thug!" said Ben. Scowling, his quick hands worked busily at the boy's stringy tie. He jerked down his vest, slipping a wadded ten-dollar bill into Eugene's pocket. "Behave yourself," he said, "or I'll beat you to death."

Max Isaacs whistled from the street. He went out to join them.

There were six in Mrs. Bowden's party: Max Isaacs, Malvin Bowden, Eugene, two girls named Josie and Louise, and Mrs. Bowden. Josie was Mrs. Bowden's niece and lived with her. She was a tall bean-pole of a girl with a prognathous mouth and stick-out grinning teeth. She was twenty. The other girl, Louise, was a waitress. She was small, plump, a warm brunette. Mrs. Bowden was a little sallow woman with ratty brown hair. She had brown worn-out eyes. She was a dressmaker. Her husband, a carpenter, had died in the Spring. There was a little insurance money. That was how she came to take the trip.

Now, by night, he was riding once more into the South. The day-coach was hot, full of the weary smell of old red plush. People dozed painfully, distressed by the mournful tolling of the bell, and the grinding halts. A baby wailed thinly. Its mother, a gaunt wisp-haired mountaineer, turned the back of the seat ahead, and bedded the child on a spread newspaper. Its wizened face peeked dirtily out of its swaddling discomfort of soiled jackets and pink ribbon. It wailed and slept. At the front of the car, a young hill-man, high-boned and red, clad in corduroys and leather leggings, shelled peanuts steadily, throwing the shells into the aisle. People trod through them with a sharp masty crackle. The boys, bored, paraded restlessly to the car-end for water. There was a crushed litter of sanitary drinking-cups upon the floor, and a stale odor from the toilets.

The two girls slept soundly on turned seats. The small one breathed warmly and sweetly through moist parted lips.

The weariness of the night wore in upon their jaded nerves, lay upon their dry hot eyeballs. They flattened noses against the dirty windows, and watched the vast structure of the earth sweep past—clumped woodlands, the bending sweep of the fields, the huge flowing lift of the earth-waves, cyclic intersections bewildering—the American earth—rude, immeasurable, formless, mighty.

His mind was bound in the sad lulling magic of the car wheels. Clackety-clack. Clackety-clack. Clackety-clack. Clackety-clack. He thought of his life as something that had happened long ago. He had found, at last, his gateway to the lost world. But did it lie before or behind him? Was he leaving or entering it? Above the rhythm of the wheels he thought of Eliza's laughter over ancient things. He saw a brief forgotten gesture, her white broad forehead, a ghost of old grief in her eyes. Ben, Gant—their strange lost voices. Their sad laughter. They swam toward him through green walls of fantasy. They caught and twisted at his heart. The green ghost-glimmer of their faces coiled away. Lost. Lost.

"Let's go for a smoke," said Max Isaacs.

They went back and stood wedged for stability on the closed platform of the car. They lighted cigarettes.

Light broke against the east, in a murky rim. The far dark was eaten cleanly away. The horizon sky was barred with hard fierce strips of light. Still buried in night, they looked across at the unimpinging sheet of day. They looked under the lifted curtain at brightness. They were knifed sharply away from it. Then, gently, light melted across the land like dew. The world was gray.

The east broke out in ragged flame. In the car, the little waitress breathed deeply, sighed, and opened her clear eyes.

Max Isaacs fumbled his cigarette awkwardly, looked at Eugene, and grinned sheepishly with delight, craning his neck along his collar, and making a nervous grimace of his white fuzz-haired face. His hair was thick, straight, the color of taffy. He had blond eyebrows. There was much kindness in him. They looked at each other with clumsy tenderness. They thought of the lost years at Woodson Street. They saw with decent wonder their awkward bulk of puberty. The proud gate of the years swung open for them. They felt a lonely glory. They said farewell.

Charleston, fat weed that roots itself on Lethe wharf, lived in another time. The hours were days, the days weeks.

They arrived in the morning. By noon, several weeks had passed, and he longed for the day's ending. They were quartered in a small hotel on King Street—an old place above stores, with big rooms. After lunch, they went out to see the town. Max Isaacs and Malvin Bowden turned at once toward the Navy Yard. Mrs. Bowden went with them. Eugene was weary for sleep. He promised to meet them later.

When they had gone, he pulled off his shoes and took off his coat and shirt, and lay down to sleep in a big dark room, into which the warm sun fell in shuttered bars. Time droned like a sleepy October fly.

At five o'clock, Louise, the little waitress, came to wake him. She, too, had wanted to sleep. She knocked gently at the door. When he did not answer, she opened it quietly and came in, closing it behind her. She came to the side of the bed and looked at him for a moment.

"Eugene!" she whispered. "Eugene."

He murmured drowsily, and stirred. The little waitress smiled and sat down on the bed. She bent over him and tickled him gently in the ribs, chuckling to see him squirm. Then she tickled the soles of his feet. He wakened slowly, yawning, rubbing sleep from his eyes.

"What is it?" he said.

"It's time to go out there," she said.

"Out where?"

"To the Navy Yard. We promised to meet them."

"Oh, damn the Navy Yard!" he groaned. "I'd rather sleep."

"So would I!" she agreed. She yawned luxuriously, stretching her plump arms above her head. "I'm so sleepy. I could stretch out anywhere." She looked meaningly at the bed.

He wakened at once, sensuously alert. He lifted himself upon one elbow: a hot torrent of blood swarmed through his cheeks. His pulses beat thickly.

"We're all alone up here," said Louise smiling. "We've got the whole floor to ourselves."

"Why don't you lie down and take a nap, if you're still sleepy?" he asked. "I'll wake you up," he added, with gentle chivalry.

"I've got such a little room. It's hot and stuffy. That's why I got up," said Louise. "What a nice big room you've got!"

"Yes," he said. "It's a nice big bed, too." They were silent a waiting moment.

"Why don't you lie down here, Louise?" he said, in a low unsteady voice. "I'll get up," he added hastily, sitting up. "I'll wake you."

"Oh, no," she said, "I wouldn't feel right."

They were again silent. She looked admiringly at his thin young arms.

"My!" she said. "I bet you're strong."

He flexed his long stringy muscles manfully, and expanded his chest.

"My!" she said. "How old are you, 'Gene?"

He was just at his fifteenth year.

"I'm going on sixteen," he said. "How old are you, Louise?"

"I'm eighteen," she said. "I bet you're a regular heart-breaker, 'Gene. How many girls have you got?"

"Oh—I don't know. Not many," he said truthfully enough

He wanted to talk—he wanted to talk madly, seductively, wickedly. He would excite her by uttering, in grave respectful tones, honestly, matter-of-factly, the most erotic suggestions.

"I guess you like the tall ones, don't you?" said Louise. "A tall fellow wouldn't want a little thing like me, would he? Although," she said quickly, "you never know. They say opposites attract each other."

"I don't like tall girls," said Eugene. "They're too skinny. I like them about your size, when they've got a good build."

"Have I got a good build, 'Gene?" said Louise, holding her arms up and smiling.

"Yes, you have a pretty build, Louise—a fine build," said Eugene earnestly. "The kind I like."

"I haven't got a pretty face. I've got an ugly face," she said invitingly.

"You haven't got an ugly face. You have a pretty face," said Eugene firmly. "Anyway, the face doesn't matter much with me," he added, subtly.

"What do you like best, 'Gene?" Louise asked.

He thought carefully and gravely.

"Why," he said, "a woman ought to have pretty legs. Sometimes a woman has an ugly face, but a pretty leg. The prettiest legs I ever saw were on a High Yellow."

"Were they prettier than mine?" said the waitress, with an easy laugh.

She crossed her legs slowly and displayed her silk-shod ankle.

"I don't know, Louise," he said, staring critically. "I can't see enough."

"Is that enough?" she said, pulling her tight skirt above her calves.

"No," said Eugene.

"Is that?" she pulled her skirt back over her knees, and displayed her plump thighs, gartered with a ruffled band of silk and red rosettes. She thrust her small feet out, coyly turning the toes in.

"Lord!" said Eugene, staring with keen interest at the garter. "I never saw any like that before. That's pretty." He gulped noisily. "Don't those things hurt you, Louise?"

"Uh-uh," she said, as if puzzled, "why?"

"I should think they'd cut into your skin," he said. "I know mine do if I wear them too tight. See."

He pulled up his trousers' leg and showed his young gartered shank, lightly spired with hair.

Louise looked, and felt the garter gravely with a plump hand.

"Mine don't hurt me," she said. She snapped the elastic with a ripe smack. "See!"

"Let me see," he said. He placed his trembling fingers lightly upon her garter.

"Yes," he said unsteadily. "I see."

Her round young weight lay heavy against him, her warm young face turned blindly up to his own. His brain reeled as if drunken, he dropped his mouth awkwardly upon her parted lips. She sank back heavily on the pillows. He planted dry and clumsy kisses upon her mouth, her eyes, in little circles round her throat and face. He fumbled at the throat-hook of her waist, but his fingers shook so violently that he could not unfasten it. She lifted her smooth hands with a comatose gesture, and unfastened it for him.

Then he lifted his beet-red face, and whispered tremulously, not knowing well what he said:

"You're a nice girl, Louise. A pretty girl."

She thrust her pink fingers slowly through his hair, drew back his face into her breasts again, moaned softly as he kissed her, and clutched his hair in an aching grip. He put his arms around her and drew her to him. They devoured each other with young wet kisses, insatiate, unhappy, trying to grow together in their embrace, draw out the last distillation of desire in a single kiss.

He lay sprawled, scattered and witless with passion, unable to collect and focus his heat. He heard the wild tongueless cries of desire, the inchoate ecstasy that knows no gateway of release. But he knew fear—not the social fear, but the fear of ignorance, of discovery. He feared his potency. He spoke to her thickly, wildly, not hearing himself speak.

"Do you want me to? Do you want me to, Louise?"

She drew his face down, murmuring:

"You won't hurt me, 'Gene? You wouldn't do anything to hurt me, honey? If anything happens—" she said drowsily.

He seized the straw of her suggestion.

"I won't be the first. I won't be the one to begin you. I've never started a girl off," he babbled, aware vaguely that he was voicing an approved doctrine of chivalry. "See here, Louise!" he shook her—she seemed drugged. "You've got to tell me before—. I won't do *that!*. I may be a bad fellow, but nobody can say I ever did that. Do you hear!" His voice rose shrilly; his face worked wildly; he was hardly able to speak.

"I say, do you hear? Am I the first one, or not? You've got to answer! Did you ever——before?"

She looked at him lazily. She smiled.

"No," she said.

"I may be bad, but I won't do that." He had become inarticulate; his voice went off into a speechless jargon. Gasping, stammering, with contorted and writhing face, he sought for speech.

She rose suddenly, and put her warm arms comfortingly around him. Soothing and caressing him, she drew him down on her breast. She stroked his head, and talked quietly to him.

"I know you wouldn't, honey. I know you wouldn't. Don't talk. Don't say anything. Why, you're all excited, dear. There. Why, you're shaking like a leaf. You're high-strung, honey. That's what it is. You're a bundle of nerves."

He wept soundlessly into her arm.

He became quieter. She smiled, and kissed him softly.

"Put on your clothes," said Louise. "We ought to get started if we're going out there."

In his confusion he tried to draw on a pair of Mrs. Bowden's cast-off pumps. Louise laughed richly, and thrust her fingers through his hair.

At the Navy Yard, they could not find the Bowdens nor Max Isaacs. A young sailor took them over a destroyer. Louise went up a railed iron ladder with an emphatic rhythm of her shapely thighs. She showed her legs. She stared impudently at a picture of a chorus lady, cut from the *Police Gazette*. The young sailor rolled his eyes aloft with an expression of innocent debauchery. Then he winked heavily at Eugene.

The deck of the Oregon.

"What's that for?" said Louise, pointing to the outline in nails of Admiral Dewey's foot.

"That's where he stood during the fight," said the sailor.

Louise put her small foot within the print of the greater one. The sailor winked at Eugene. You may fire when you are ready, Gridley.

"She's a nice girl," said Eugene.

"Yeah," said Max Isaacs. "She's a nice lady." He craned his neck awkwardly, and squinted. "About how old is she?"

"She's eighteen," said Eugene.

Malvin Bowden stared at him.

"You're crazy!" said he. "She's twenty-one."

"No," said Eugene, "she's eighteen. She told me so."

"I don't care," said Malvin Bowden, "she's no such thing. She's twenty-one. I reckon I ought to know. My folks have known her for five years. She had a baby when she was eighteen."

"Aw!" said Max Isaacs.

"Yes," said Malvin Bowden, "a travelling man got her in trouble. Then he ran away."

"Aw!" said Max Isaacs. "Without marryin' her or anything?"

"He didn't do nothing for her. He ran away," said Malvin Bowden. "Her people are raising the kid now."

"Great Day!" said Max Isaacs slowly. Then, sternly, he added, "A man who'd do a thing like that ought to be shot."

"You're right!" said Malvin Bowden.

They loafed along the Battery, along the borders of ruined Camelot.

"Those are nice old places," said Max Isaacs. "They've been good houses in their day."

He looked greedily at wrought-iron gateways; the old lust of his childhood for iron-scraps awoke.

"Those are old Southern mansions," said Eugene, reverently.

The bay was still: there was a green stench of warm standing water.

"They've let the place run down," said Malvin. "It's no bigger now than it was before the Civil War."

No, sir, and, by heaven, so long as one true Southern heart is left alive to remember Appomattox, Reconstruction, and the Black parliaments, we will defend with our dearest blood our menaced, but sacred, traditions.

"They need some Northern capital," said Max Isaacs sagely. They all did.

An old woman, wearing a tiny bonnet, was led out on a high veranda from one of the houses, by an attentive negress. She seated herself in a porch rocker and stared blindly into the sun. Eugene looked at her sympathetically. She had probably not been informed by her loyal children of the unsuccessful termination of the war. United in their brave deception, they stinted themselves daily, reining in on their proud stomachs in order that she might have all the luxury to which she had been accustomed. What did she eat? The wing of a chicken, no doubt, and a glass of dry sherry. Meanwhile, all the valuable heirlooms had been pawned or sold. Fortunately, she was almost blind, and could not see the wastage of their fortune. It was very sad. But did she not sometimes think of that old time of the wine and the roses? When knighthood was in flower?

"Look at that old lady," whispered Malvin Bowden.

"You can *tell* she's a lady," said Max Isaacs. "I bet she's never turned her hand over."

"An old family," said Eugene gently. "The Southern aristocracy."

An old negro came by, fringed benevolently by white whiskers. A good old man—an ante-bellum darkey. Dear Lord, their number was few in these unhappy days.

Eugene thought of the beautiful institution of human slavery, which his slaveless maternal ancestry had fought so valiantly to preserve. Bress de Lawd, Marse! Ole Mose doan' wan' to be free niggah. How he goan' lib widout marse? He doan' wan' stahve wid free niggahs. Har, har, har!

Philanthropy. Pure philanthropy. He brushed a tear from his een.

They were going across the harbor to the Isle of Palms. As the boat churned past the round brick cylinder of Fort Sumter, Malvin Bowden said:

"They had the most men. If things had been even, we'd have beaten them."

"They didn't beat us," said Max Isaacs. "We wore ourselves out beating them."

"We were defeated," said Eugene, quietly, "not beaten."

Max Isaacs stared at him dumbly.

"Aw!" he said.

They left the little boat, and ground away toward the beach in a street-car. The land had grown dry and yellow in the enervation of the summer. The foliage was coated with dust: they rattled past cheap summer houses, baked and blistered, stogged drearily in the sand. They were small, flimsy, a multitudinous vermin—all with their little wooden sign of lodging. "The Ishkabibble," "Seaview," "Rest Haven," "Atlantic Inn,"—Eugene looked at them, reading with weariness the bleached and jaded humor of their names.

"There are a lot of boarding-houses in the world," said he.

A hot wind of beginning autumn rustled dryly through the long parched leaves of stunted palms. Before them rose the huge rusted spokes of a Ferris Wheel. St. Louis. They had reached the beach.

Malvin Bowden leaped joyously from the car.

"Last one in's a rotten egg!" he cried, and streaked for the bathhouse.

"Kings! I've got kings, son," yelled Max Isaacs. He held up his crossed fingers. The beach was bare: two or three concessions stood idly open for business. The sky curved over them, a cloudless blue burnished bowl. The sea offshore was glazed emerald: the waves rode heavily in, thickening murkily as they turned with sunlight and sediment to a beachy yellow.

They walked slowly down the beach toward the bathhouse. The tranquil, incessant thunder of the sea made in them a lonely music. Seawards, their eyes probed through the seething glare.

"I'm going to join the navy, 'Gene," said Max Isaacs. "Come on and go with me."

"I'm not old enough," said Eugene. "You're not, either."

"I'll be sixteen in November," said Max Isaacs defensively.

"That's not old enough."

"I'm going to lie to get in," said Max Isaacs. "They won't bother you. You can get in. Come on."

"No," said Eugene. "I can't."

"Why not?" said Max Isaacs. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to college," said Eugene. "I'm going to get an education and study law."

"You'll have lots of time," said Max Isaacs. "You can go to college when you come out. They teach you a lot in the navy. They give you a good training. You go everywhere."

"No," said Eugene. "I can't."

But his pulse throbbed as he listened to the lonely thunder of the sea. He saw strange dusky faces, palm frondage, and heard the little tinkling sounds of Asia. He believed in harbors at the end.

Mrs. Bowden's niece and the waitress came out on the next car. After his immersion he lay, trembling slightly under the gusty wind, upon the beach. A fine tang of salt was on his lips. He licked his clean young flesh.

Louise came from the bathhouse and walked slowly toward him. She came proudly, her warm curves moulded into her bathing-suit: her legs were covered with stockings of green silk.

Far out, beyond the ropes, Max Isaacs lifted his white heavy arms, and slid swiftly through a surging wall of green water. His body glimmered greenly for a moment; he stood erect wiping his eyes and shaking water from his ears.

Eugene took the waitress by the hand and led her into the water. She advanced slowly, with little twittering cries. An undulant surge rolled in deceptively, and rose suddenly to her chin, drinking her breath. She gasped and clung to him. Initiated, they bucked deliciously through a roaring wall of water, and, while her eyes were still closed, he caught her to him with young salty kisses.

Presently they came out, and walked over the wet strip of beach into the warm loose sand, bedding their dripping bodies gratefully in its warmth. The waitress shivered: he moulded sand over her legs and hips, until she was half buried. He kissed her, stilling his trembling lips upon her mouth.

"I like you! I like you a lot!" he said.

"What did they tell you about me?" she said. "Did they talk about me?"

"I don't care," he said. "I don't care about that. I like you."

"You won't remember me, honey, when you start going with the girls. You'll forget about me. Some day you'll see me, and you won't even know me. You won't recognize me. You'll pass without speaking."

"No," he said. "I'll never forget you, Louise. So long as I live."

Their hearts were filled with the lonely thunder of the sea. She kissed him. They were hill-born.

He returned in late September.

In October, Gant, with Ben and Helen, departed for Baltimore. The operation, too long deferred, was now inevitable. His disease had grown steadily worse. He had gone through a period of incessant pain. He was enfeebled. He was frightened.

Rising at night, he would rouse the sleeping house with his cries, commanding terror with his old magnificence.

"I see it! I see it! The knife! The knife! . . . Do you see its shadow? . . . There! There! There!"

With Boothian gusto he recoiled, pointing to invulnerable nothings.

"Do you see him standing there in the shadows? So you've come at last to take the old man with you? . . . There he stands—the Grim Reaper—as I always knew he would. Jesus, have mercy on my soul!"

Gant lay in a long cot in the Urological Institute at Johns Hopkins. Every day a cheerful little man came briskly in and looked at his chart. He talked happily and went away. He was one of the greatest surgeons in the country.

"Don't worry," said the nurse encouragingly, "the mortality's only four per cent. It used to be thirty. He's reduced it."

Gant groaned, and slipped his big hand into his daughter's vital grasp.

"Don't worry, old boy!" she said, "you're going to be as good as you ever were, after this."

She fed him with her life, her hope, her love. He was almost tranquil when they wheeled him in to his operation.

But the little gray-haired man looked, shook his head regretfully, and trimmed deftly.

"All right!" he said, four minutes later, to his assistant. "Close the wound."

Gant was dying of cancer.

Gant sat in a wheeled chair upon the high fifth-floor veranda, looking out through bright October air at the city spread far into the haze before him. He looked very clean, almost fragile. A faint grin of happiness and relief hovered about his thin mouth. He smoked a long cigar, with fresh-awakened senses.

"There," he said pointing, "is where I spent part of my boyhood. Old Jeff Streeter's hotel stood about there," he pointed.

"Dig down!" said Helen, grinning.

Gant thought of the years between, and the vexed pattern of fate. His life seemed strange to him.

"We'll go to see all those places when you get out of here. They're going to let you out of here, day after to-morrow. Did you know that? Did you know you're almost well?" she cried with a big smile.

"I'm going to be a well man after this," said Gant. "I feel twenty years younger!"

"Poor old papa!" she said. "Poor old papa!"

Her eyes were wet. She put her big hands on his face, and drew his head against her.

XXVII

My Shakespeare, rise! He rose. The bard rose throughout the length and breadth of his brave new world. He was not for an age, but for all time. Then, too, his tercentenary happened only once—at the end of three hundred years. It was observed piously from Maryland to Oregon. Eighty-one members of the House of Representatives, when asked by literate journalists for their favorite lines, replied instantly with a quotation from Polonius: "This above all: to thine own self be true." The Swan was played, and pageanted, and essayed in every schoolhouse in the land.

Eugene tore the Chandos portrait from the pages of the *Independent* and nailed it to the calcimined wall of the back-room. Then, still full of the great echoing pæan of Ben Jonson's, he scrawled below it in large trembling letters: "My Shakespeare, rise!" The large plump face—"as damned silly a head as ever I looked at"—stared baldly at him with goggle eyes, the goatee pointed ripe with hayseed vanity. But, lit by the presence, Eugene plunged back into the essay littered across his table.

He was discovered. In an unwise absence, he left the Bard upon the wall. When he returned, Ben and Helen had read his scrawl. Thereafter, he was called poetically to table, to the telephone, to go an errand.

"My Shakespeare, rise!"

With red resentful face, he rose.

"Will My Shakespeare pass the biscuits?" or, "Could I trouble My Shakespeare for the butter?" said Ben, scowling at him.

"My Shakespeare! My Shakespeare! Do you want another piece of pie?" said Helen. Then, full of penitent laughter, she added: "That's a shame! We oughtn't to treat the poor kid like that." Laughing, she plucked at her large straight chin, gazing out the window, and laughing absently—penitently, laughing.

But—"his art was universal. He saw life clearly and he saw it whole. He was an intellectual ocean whose waves touched every shore of thought. He was all things in one: lawyer, merchant, soldier, doctor, statesman. Men of science have been amazed by the depth of his learning. In *The Merchant of Venice,* he deals with the most technical questions of law with the skill of an attorney. In *King Lear,* he boldly prescribes sleep as a remedy for Lear's insanity. 'Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care.' Thus, he has foreseen the latest researches of modern science by almost three centuries. In his sympathetic and well-rounded sense of characterization, he laughs with, not at, his characters."

Eugene won the medal—bronze or of some other material even more enduring. The Bard's profile murkily indented. W. S. 1616–1916. A long and useful life.

The machinery of the pageant was beautiful and simple. Its author—Dr. George B. Rockham, at one time, it was whispered, a trouper with the Ben Greet players—had seen to that. All the words had been written by Dr. George B. Rockham, and all the words, accordingly, had been written for Dr. George B. Rockham. Dr. George B. Rockham was the Voice of History. The innocent children of Altamont's schools were the mute illustrations of that voice.

Eugene was Prince Hal. The day before the pageant his costume arrived from Philadelphia. At John Dorsey Leonard's direction he put it on. Then he came out sheepishly before John Dorsey on the school veranda, fingering his tin sword and looking somewhat doubtfully at his pink silk hose which came three quarters up his skinny shanks, and left exposed, below his doublet, a six-inch hiatus of raw thigh.

John Dorsey Leonard looked gravely.

"Here, boy," he said. "Let me see!"

He pulled strongly at the top of the deficient hose, with no result save to open up large runs in them. Then John Dorsey Leonard began to laugh. He slid helplessly down upon the porch rail, and bent over, palsied with silent laughter, from which a high whine, full of spittle, presently emerged.

"O-oh my Lord!" he gasped. "Egscuse me!" he panted, seeing the boy's angry face. "It's the funniest thing I ever—" at this moment his voice died of paralysis.

"I'll fix you," said Miss Amy. "I've got just the thing for you."

She gave him a full baggy clown's suit, of green linen. It was a relic of a Hallowe'en party; its wide folds were gartered about his ankles.

He turned a distressed, puzzled face toward Miss Amy.

"That's not right, is it?" he asked. "He never wore anything like that, did he?"

Miss Amy looked. Her deep bosom heaved with full contralto laughter.

"Yes, that's right! That's fine!" she yelled. "He was like that, anyway. No one will ever notice, boy." She collapsed heavily into a wicker chair which widened with a protesting creak.

"Oh, Lord!" she groaned, wet-cheeked. "I don't believe I ever saw——"

The pageant was performed on the embowered lawns of the Manor House. Dr. George B. Rockham stood in a green hollow—a natural amphitheatre. His audience sat on the turf of the encircling banks. As the phantom cavalcades of poetry and the drama wound down to him, Dr. George B. Rockham disposed of each character neatly in descriptive pentameter verse. He was dressed in the fashion of the Restoration—a period he coveted because it understood the charms of muscular calves. His heavy legs bulged knottily below a coy fringe of drawer-ruffles.

Eugene stood waiting on the road above, behind an obscuring wall of trees. It was rich young May. "Doc" Hines (Falstaff) waited beside him. His small tough face grinned apishly over garments stuffed with yards of wadding. Grinning, he smote himself upon his swollen paunch: the blow left a dropsical depression.

He turned, with a comical squint, on Eugene:

"Hal," said he, "you're a hell of a looking prince."

"You're no beauty, Jack," said Eugene.

Behind him, Julius Arthur (Macbeth), drew his sword with a flourish.

"I challenge you, Hal," said he.

In the young shimmering light their tin swords clashed rapidly. Twittered with young bird-laughter, on bank and saddle sprawled, all of the Bard's *personæ.* Julius Arthur thrust swiftly, was warded, then, with loose grin, buried his brand suddenly in "Doc" Hines' receiving paunch. The company of the immortal shrieked happily.

Miss Ida Nelson, the assistant director, rushed angrily among them.

"Sh!" she hissed loudly. "Sh-h!" She was very angry. She had spent the afternoon hissing loudly.

Swinging gently in her side-saddle, Rosalind, on horseback, a ripe little beauty from the convent, smiled warmly at him. Looking, he forgot.

Below them, on the road, the crowded press loosened slowly, broke off in minute fragments, and disappeared into the hidden gulch of Dr. George B. Rockham's receiving voice. With fat hammy sonority he welcomed them.

But he had not come to Shakespeare. The pageant had opened with the Voices of Past and Present—voices a trifle out of harmony with the tenor of event—but necessary to the commercial success of the enterprise. These voices now moved voicelessly past—four frightened sales-ladies from Schwartzberg's, clad decently in cheese-cloth and sandals, who came by bearing the banner of their concern. Or, as the doctor's more eloquent iambics had it:

> "Fair Commerce, sister of the arts, thou, too,
> Shalt take thy lawful place upon our stage."

They came and passed: Ginsberg's—"the glass of fashion and the mould of form"; Bradley the Grocer—"when first Pomona held her fruity horn"; The Buick Agency—"the chariots of Oxus and of Ind."

Came, passed—like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream.

Behind them, serried ranks of cherubim, the marshalled legions of Altamont's Sunday schools, each in white arrayed and clutching grimly in tiny hands two thousand tiny flags of freedom, God's small angels, and surely there for God knows what far-off event, began to move into the hollow. Their teachers nursed them gently into action, with tapping feet and palms.

"One, two, *three,* four. One, two, *three,* four. Quickly, children!"

A hidden orchestra, musical in the trees, greeted them, as they approached, with holy strains: the Baptists, with the simple doctrine of "It's the Old-time Religion"; the Methodists, with "I'll Be Waiting at the River"; the Presbyterians, with "Rock of Ages"; the Episcopalians, with "Jesus, Lover of My Soul"; and rising to lyrical climactic passion, the little Jews, with the nobly marching music of "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

They passed without laughter. There was a pause.

"Well, thank God for that!" said Ralph Rolls coarsely in a solemn quiet. The Bard's strewn host laughed, rustled noisily into line.

"Sh-h! Sh-h!" hissed Miss Ida Nelson.

"What the hell does she think she is?" said Julius Arthur, "a steam valve?"

Eugene looked attentively at the shapely legs of the page, Viola.

"Wow!" said Ralph Rolls, with his accustomed audibility. "Look who's here!"

She looked on them all with a pert impartial smile. But she never told her love.

Miss Ida Nelson caught the doctor's stealthy sign. Carefully, in slow twos, she fed them down to him.

The Moor of Venice (Mr. George Graves), turned his broad back upon their jibes, and lurched down with sullen-sheepish grin, unable to conceal the massive embarrassment of his calves.

"Tell him who you are, Villa," said Doc Hines. "You look like Jack Johnson."

The town, in its first white shirting of Spring, sat on the turfy banks, and looked down gravely upon the bosky little comedy of errors; the encircling mountains, and the gods thereon, looked down upon the slightly larger theatre of the town; and, figuratively, from mountains that looked down on mountains, the last stronghold of philosophy, the author of this chronicle looked down on everything.

"Here we go, Hal," said Doc Hines, nudging Eugene.

"Give 'em hell, son," said Julius Arthur. "You're dressed for the part."

"He looks it, you mean," said Ralph Rolls. "Boy, you'll knock 'em dead," he added with an indecent laugh.

They descended into the hollow, accompanied by a low but growing titter of amazement from the audience. Before them, the doctor had just disposed of Desdemona, who parted with a graceful obeisance. He was now engaged on Othello, who stood, bullish and shy, till his ordeal should finish. In a moment, he strode away, and the doctor turned to Falstaff, reading the man by his padded belly, briskly, with relief:

"Now, Tragedy, begone, and to our dell
Bring antic Jollity with cap and bells:
Falstaff, thou prince of jesters, lewd old man
Who surfeited a royal prince with mirth,
And swayed a kingdom with his wanton quips——"

Embarrassed by the growing undertone of laughter, Doc Hines squinted around with a tough grin, gave a comical hitch to his padded figure, and whispered a hoarse aside to Eugene: "Hear that, Hal? I'm hell on wheels, ain't I?"

Eugene saw him depart in a green blur, and presently became aware that an unnatural silence had descended upon Doctor George B. Rockham. The Voice of History was, for the moment, mute. Its long jaw, in fact, had fallen ajar.

Dr. George B. Rockham looked wildly about him for succor. He rolled his eyes entreatingly upwards at Miss Ida Nelson. She turned her head away.

"Who are you?" he said hoarsely, holding a hairy hand carefully beside his mouth.

"Prince Hal," said Eugene, likewise hoarsely and behind his hand.

Dr. George B. Rockham staggered a little. Their speech had reached the stalls. But firmly, before the tethered chafing laughter, he began:

"Friend to the weak and comrade of the wild,
By folly sired to wisdom, dauntless Hal——"

Laughter, laughter unleashed and turbulent, laughter that rose flood by flood upon itself, laughter wild, earth-shaking, thunder-cuffing, drowned Dr. George B. Rockham and all he had to say. Laughter! Laughter! Laughter!

Helen was married in the month of June—a month sacred, it is said, to Hymen, but used so often for nuptials that the god's blessing is probably not infallible.

She had returned to Altamont in May, from her last singing engagement. She had been in Atlanta for the week of opera, and had come back by way of Henderson, where she had visited Daisy and Mrs. Selborne. There she had found her mate.

He was not a stranger to her. She had known him years before in Altamont, where he had lived for a short time as district agent for the great and humane corporation that employed him—the Federal Cash Register Company. Since that time he had gone to various parts of the country at his master's bidding, carrying with him his great message of prosperity and thrift. At the present time, he lived with his sister and his aged mother, whose ponderous infirmity of limb had not impaired her appetite, in a South Carolina town. He was devoted and generous to them both. And the Federal Cash Register Company, touched by his devotion to duty, rewarded him with a good salary. His name was Barton. The Bartons lived well.

Helen returned with the unexpectedness in which all returning Gants delighted. She came in on members of her family, one afternoon, in the kitchen at Dixieland.

"Hello, everybody!" she said.

"Well, for G-g-god's sake," said Luke after a moment. "Look who's here!"

They embraced heartily.

"Why, what on earth!" cried Eliza, putting her iron down on the board, and wavering on her feet, in an effort to walk in two directions at once. They kissed.

"I was just thinking to myself," said Eliza, more calmly, "that it wouldn't surprise me a bit if you should come walking in. I had a premonition, I don't know what else you'd call it——"

"Oh, my God!" groaned the girl, good-humoredly, but with a shade of annoyance. "Don't start that Pentland spooky stuff! It makes my flesh crawl."

She exchanged a glance of burlesque entreaty with Luke. Winking, he turned suddenly, and with an idiotic laugh, tickled Eliza sharply.

"Get away!" she shrieked.

He chortled madly.

"I'll declare, boy!" she said fretfully. "I believe you're crazy. I'll vow I do!"

Helen laughed huskily.

"Well," said Eliza, "how'd you leave Daisy and the children?"

"They're all right, I suppose," said Helen wearily. "Oh, my God! Deliver me!" she laughed. "You never saw such pests! I spent fifty dollars on them in toys and presents alone! You'd never think it from the thanks I get. Daisy takes it all as her due! Selfish! Selfish! Selfish!"

"For G-g-god's sake!" said Luke loyally.

She was one fine girl.

"I paid for everything I got at Daisy's, I can assure you!" she said, sharply, challengingly. "I spent no more time there than I had to. I was at Mrs. Selborne's nearly all the time. I had practically all my meals there."

Her need for independence had become greater; her hunger for dependents acute. Her denial of obligation to others was militant. She gave more than she received.

"Well, I'm in for it," she said presently, trying to mask her strong eagerness.

"In for what?" asked Luke.

"I've gone and done it at last," she said.

"Mercy!" shrieked Eliza. "You're not married, are you?"

"Not yet," said Helen, "but I will be soon."

Then she told them about Mr. Hugh T. Barton, the cash register salesman. She spoke loyally and kindly of him, without great love.

"He's ten years older than I am," she said.

"Well," said Eliza thoughtfully, moulding her lips. "They sometimes make the best husbands." After a moment, she asked: "Has he got any property?"

"No," said Helen, "they live up all he makes. They live in style, I tell you. There are two servants in that house all the time. The old lady doesn't turn her hand over."

"Where are you going to live?" said Eliza sharply. "With his folks?"

"Well, I should say not! I should say not!" said Helen slowly and emphatically. "Good heavens, mama!" she continued irritably. "I want a home of my own. Can't you realize that? I've been doing for others all my life. Now I'm going to let them do for me. I want no in-laws about. No, sir!" she said emphatically.

Luke bit his nails nervously.

"Well, he's g-g-getting a great g-g-girl," he said. "I hope he has sense enough to realize that."

Moved, she laughed bigly, ironically.

"I've got one booster, haven't I?" she said. She looked at him seriously with clear affectionate eyes. "Well, thanks, Luke. You're one of the lot that's always had the interests of the family at heart."

Her big face was for a moment tranquil and eager. A great calm lay there: the radiant decent beauty of dawn and rain-water. Her eyes were as luminous and believing as a child's. No evil dwelt in her. She had learned nothing.

"Have you told your papa?" said Eliza, presently.

"No," she said, after a pause, "I haven't."

They thought of Gant in silence, with wonder. Her going was a marvel.

"I have a right to my own life," said Helen angrily, as if some one disputed that right, "as much as any one. Good heavens, mama! You and papa have lived your lives—don't you know that? Do you think it's right that I should go on forever looking after him? Do you?" Her voice rose under the stress of hysteria.

"Why, no-o. I never said—" Eliza began, flustered and conciliatory.

"You've spent your life f-f-finking of others and not of yourself," said Luke. "That's the trouble. They don't appreciate it."

"Well, I'm not going to any longer. That's one thing sure! No, indeed! I want a home and some children. I'm going to have them!" she said defiantly. In a moment, she added tenderly:

"Poor old papa! I wonder what he's going to say?"

He said very little. The Gants, after initial surprise, moulded new event very quickly into the texture of their lives. Abysmal change widened their souls out in a brooding unconsciousness.

Mr. Hugh Barton came up into the hills to visit his affianced kin. He came, to their huge delight, lounging in the long racing chassis of a dusty brown 1911 Buick roadster. He came, in a gaseous coil, to the roaring explosion of great engines. He descended, a tall, elegant figure, dyspeptic, lean almost to emaciation, very foppishly laundered and tailored. He looked the car over slowly, critically, a long cigar clamped in the corner of his saturnine mouth, drawing his gauntlets off deliberately. Then, in the same unhurried fashion, he removed from his head the ten-gallon gray sombrero—the only astonishing feature of his otherwise undebatable costume—and shook each long thin leg delicately for a moment to straighten out the wrinkles. But there were none. Then, deliberately, he came up the walk to Dixieland, where the Gants were assembled. As he came, unhurried, he took the cigar from his mouth calmly and held it in the fingers of his lean, hairy, violently palsied hand. His thin black hair, fine spun, was fanned lightly from its elegance by a wantoning breeze. He espied his betrothed and grinned, with dignity, sardonically, with big nuggets of gold teeth. They greeted and kissed.

"This is my mother, Hugh," said Helen.

Hugh Barton bent slowly, courteously, from his thin waist. He fastened on Eliza a keen penetrating stare that discomposed her. His lips twisted again in an impressive sardonic smile. Every one felt he was going to say something very, very important.

"How do you do?" he asked, and took her hand.

Every one then felt that Hugh Barton had said something very, very important.

With equal slow gravity he greeted each one. They were somewhat awed by his lordliness. Luke, however, burst out uncontrollably:

"You're g-g-getting a fine girl, Mr. B-b-barton."

Hugh Barton turned on him slowly and fixed him with his keen stare.

"I think so," he said gravely. His voice was deep, deliberate, with an impressive rasp. He was selling himself.

In an awkward silence he turned, grinning amiably, on Eugene.

"Have a cigar?" he asked, taking three long powerful weeds from his upper vest pocket, and holding them out in his clean twitching fingers.

"Thanks," said Eugene with a dissipated leer, "I'll smoke a Camel."

He took a package of cigarettes from his pocket. Gravely, Hugh Barton held a match for him.

"Why do you wear the big hat?" asked Eugene.

"Psychology," he said. "It makes 'em talk."

"I tell you what!" said Eliza, beginning to laugh. "That's pretty smart, isn't it?"

"Sure!" said Luke. "That's advertising! It pays to advertise!"

"Yes," said Mr. Barton slowly, "you've got to get the other fellow's psychology."

The phrase seemed to describe an action of modified assault and restrained pillage.

They liked him very much. They all went into the house.

Hugh Barton's mother was in her seventy-fourth year, but she had the strength of a healthy woman of fifty, and the appetite of two of forty. She was a powerful old lady, six feet tall, with the big bones of a man, and a heavy full-jawed face, sensuous and complacent, and excellently equipped with a champing mill of strong yellow horse-teeth. It was cake and pudding to see her at work on corn on the cob. A slight paralysis had slowed her tongue and thickened her speech a little, so that she spoke deliberately, with a ponderous enunciation of each word. This deformity, which she carefully hid, added to, rather than subtracted from, the pontifical weight of her opinions: she was an earnest Republican—in memory of her departed mate—and she took a violent dislike to any one who opposed her political judgment. When thwarted or annoyed in any way, the heavy benevolence of her face was dislodged by a thunder-cloud of petulance, and her wide pouting underlip rolled out like a window-shade. But, as she barged slowly along, one big hand gripping a heavy stick on which she leaned her massive weight, she was an impressive dowager.

"She's a lady—a real lady," said Helen proudly. "Any one can see that! She goes out with all the best people."

Hugh Barton's sister, Mrs. Genevieve Watson, was a sallow woman of thirty-eight years, tall, wren-like and emaciated, like her brother; dyspeptic, and very elegantly kept. The divorced Watson was conspicuous for his absence from all conversations: there was once or twice a heavy flutter around his name, a funereal hush, and a muttered suggestion of oriental debauchery.

"He was a beast," said Hugh Barton, "a low dog. He treated sister very badly."

Mrs. Barton wagged her great head with the slow but emphatic approval she accorded all her son's opinions.

"O-o-h!" she said. "He was a ter-rib-bul man."

He had, they inferred, been given to hellish practices. He had "gone after other women."

Sister Veve had a narrow discontented face, a metallic vivacity, an effusive cordiality. She was always very smartly dressed. She had somewhat vague connections in the real estate business; she spoke grandly of obscure affairs; she was always on the verge of an indefinite "Big Deal."

"I'm getting them lined up, brother," she would say with cheerful confidence. "Things are coming my way. J. D. came in to-day and said: 'Veve—you're the only woman in the world that can put this thing across. Go to it, little girl. There's a fortune in it for you.'" And so on.

Her conversation, Eugene thought, was not unlike Brother Steve's.

But their affection and loyalty for one another was beautiful. Its unaccustomed faith, its abiding tranquillity, puzzled and disturbed the Gants. They were touched indefinably, a little annoyed, because of it.

The Bartons came to Woodson Street two weeks before the wedding. Within three days after their arrival, Helen and old lady Barton were at odds. It was inevitable. The heat of the girl's first affection for Barton's family wore off very quickly: her possessive instinct asserted itself—she would halve no one's love, she would share with no other a place in the heart. She would own, she would possess completely. She would be generous, but she would be mistress. She would give. It was the law of her nature.

She began immediately, by force of this essential stress, to make out a case against the old woman.

Mrs. Barton, too, felt the extent of her loss. She wanted to be sure that Helen realized the extent of her acquisition of one of the latter-day saints.

Rocking ponderously in the dark on Gant's veranda, the old woman would say:

"You are get-ting a good boy, Hel-en." She would wag her powerful head from side to side, pugnaciously emphatic. "Though I do say it myself, you are get-ting one good boy, Hel-en. A bet-ter boy than Hugh does-ent live."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Helen, annoyed. "I don't think it's such a bad bargain for him either, you know. I think pretty well of myself, too." And she would laugh, huskily, heartily, trying in laughter to conceal her resentment, but visibly, to every eye but Mrs. Barton's, angered.

A moment later, on some pretext, she would go back into the house, where, with a face contorted by her rising hysteria, to Luke, Eugene, or any sympathetic audience, she would burst out:

"You heard that, didn't you? You heard that? You see what I've got to put up with, don't you? Do you see? Do you blame me for not wanting that damned old woman around? Do you?

You see how she wants to run things, don't you? Do you see how she rubs it into me whenever she gets a chance? She can't bear to give him up. Of course not! He's her meal-ticket. They've bled him white. Why, even now, if it came to a question of choosing between us—" her face worked strongly. She could not continue. In a moment she quieted herself, and said decisively: "I suppose you know now why we're going to live away from them. You see, don't you? Do you blame me?"

"No'm," said Eugene, obedient after pumping.

"It's a d-d-damn shame!" said Luke loyally.

At this moment Mrs. Barton, kindly but authoritative, called from the veranda:

"Hel-en! Where are you, Hel-en?"

"O gotohell. Gotohell!" said Helen, in a comic undertone.

"Yes? What is it?" she called out sharply.

You see, don't you?

She was married at Dixieland, because she was having a big wedding. She knew a great many people.

As her wedding-day approached, her suppressed hysteria mounted. Her sense of decorum grew militant: she attacked Eliza bitterly for keeping certain dubious people in the house.

"Mama, in heaven's name! What do you mean by allowing such goings-on right in the face of Hugh and his people? What do you suppose they think of it? Have you no respect for my feelings? Good heavens, are you going to have the house full of chippies on the night of my wedding?" Her voice was high and cracked. She almost wept.

"Why, child!" said Eliza, with troubled face. "What do you mean? I've never noticed anything."

"Are you blind! Every one's talking about it! They're practically living together!" This last was a reference to a condition existing between a dissipated and alcoholic young man and a darkly handsome young woman, slightly tubercular.

To Eugene was assigned the task of digging this couple out of their burrow. He waited sternly outside the girl's room, watching the shadow dance at the door crack. At the end of the sixth hour, the besieged surrendered—the man came out. The boy—pallid, but proud of his trust—told the house-defiler that he must go. The young man agreed with cheerful alcoholism. He went at once.

Mrs. Pert was saved in the house-cleaning.

"After all," said Helen, "what do we know about her? They can say what they like about Fatty. I like her."

Ferns, flowers, potted plants, presents and guests arriving. The long nasal drone of the Presbyterian minister. The packed crowd. The triumphant booming of "The Wedding March."

A flashlight: Hugh Barton and his bride limply astare—frightened; Gant, Ben, Luke, and Eugene, widely, sheepishly agrin; Eliza, high-sorrowful and sad; Mrs. Selborne and a smile of subtle mystery; the pert flower-girls; Pearl Hines' happy laughter.

When it was over, Eliza and her daughter hung in each other's arms, weeping.

Eliza repeated over and over, from guest to guest:

> "A son is a son till he gets him a wife,
> But a daughter's a daughter all the days of her life."

She was comforted.

They escaped at length, wilted, from the thronging press of well-wishing guests. White-faced, scared witless, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Barton got into a closed car. It was done! They would spend the night at the Battery Hill. Ben had engaged the wedding-suite. To-morrow, a honeymoon to Niagara.

Before they went, the girl kissed Eugene with something of the old affection.

"I'll see you in the Fall, honey. Come over as soon as you're settled."

For Hugh Barton was beginning life with his bride in a new place. He was going to the capital of the State. And it had already been determined, chiefly by Gant, that Eugene was going to the State University.

But Hugh and Helen did not go honeymooning the next morning, as they had planned. During the night, as she lay at

Dixieland, old Mrs. Barton was taken with a violent, a retching sickness. For once, her massive digestive mechanism failed to meet the heavy demands she had put upon it during the prenuptial banqueting. She came near death.

Hugh and Helen returned abruptly next morning to a scene of dismal tinsellings and jaded lilies. Helen hurled her vitality into the sick woman's care; dominant, furious, all-mastering, she blew back her life into her. Within three days, Mrs. Barton was out of danger; but her complete recovery was slow, ugly, and painful. As the days lengthened out wearily, the girl became more and more bitter over her thwarted honeymoon. Rushing out of the sick-room, she would enter Eliza's kitchen with writhen face, unable to control her anger:

"That damned old woman! Sometimes I believe she did it on purpose! My God, am I to get no happiness from life? Will they never leave me alone? Urr-p! Urr-p!"—Her rough bacchic smile played loosely over her large unhappy face. "Mama, in God's name where does it all come from?" she said, grinning tearfully. "I do nothing but mop up after her. Will you please tell me how long it's going to last?"

Eliza laughed slyly, passing her finger under her broad nose-wing.

"Why, child!" she said. "What in the world! I've never seen the like! She must have saved up for the last six months."

"Yes, sir!" said Helen, looking vaguely away, with a profane smile playing across her mouth, "I'd just like to know where the hell it all comes from. I've had everything else," she said, with a rough angry laugh, "I'm expecting one of her kidneys at any minute."

"Whew-w!" cried Eliza, shaken with laughter.

"Hel-en! Oh Hel-en!" Mrs. Barton's voice came feebly in to them.

"O gotohell!" said the girl, sotto-voce. "Urr-p! Urr-p!" She burst suddenly into tears: "Is it going to be like this always! I sometimes believe the judgment of God is against us all. Papa was right."

"Pshaw!" said Eliza, wetting her fingers, and threading a needle before the light. "I'd go on and pay no more attention to her. There's nothing wrong with her. It's all imagination!" It was Eliza's rooted conviction that most human ills, except her own, were "all imagination."

"Hel-en!"

"All right! I'm coming!" the girl cried cheerfully, turning an angry grin on Eliza as she went. It was funny. It was ugly. It was terrible.

It seemed, in fact, that papa was right, and that the chief celestial Cloud-Pusher, the often hymned, whom our bitter moderns have sometimes called "the ancient Jester"—had turned his frown upon their fortunes.

It began to rain—rain incessant, spouting, torrential rain, fell among the reeking hills, leaving grass and foliage drowned upon the slopes, starting the liquid avalanche of earth upon a settlement, glutting lean rocky mountain-streams to a foaming welter of yellow flood. It mined the yellow banks away with unheard droppings; it caved in hillsides; it drank the steep banked earth away below the rails, leaving them strung to their aerial ties across a gutted canyon.

There was a flood in Altamont. It swept down in a converging width from the hills, filling the little river, and foaming beyond its banks in a wide waste Mississippi. It looted the bottomlands of the river; it floated iron and wooden bridges from their piers as it might float a leaf; it brought ruin to the railway flats and all who dwelt therein.

The town was cut off from every communication with the world. At the end of the third week, as the waters slid back into their channels, Hugh Barton and his bride, crouched grimly in the great pit of the Buick, rode out through flooded roads, crawled desperately over ruined trestles, daring the irresistible wrath of water to achieve their wilted anti-climactic honeymoon.

"He will go where I send him or not at all," Gant spoke his final word, not loudly.

Thus, it was decided that Eugene must go to the State University.

Eugene did not want to go to the State University.

For two years he had romanced with Margaret Leonard about his future education. It was proposed that, in view of his youth, he should attend Vanderbilt (or Virginia) for two years, go to Harvard for two years more, and then, having arrived by easy stages at Paradise, "top things off" with a year or two at Oxford.

"Then," said John Dorsey Leonard, who talked enchantingly on the subject, between mouthfuls of clabber, "then, my sonny, a man may begin to say he's really 'cultsherd.' After that, of course," he continued with a spacious carelessness, "he may travel for a year or so."

But the Leonards were not yet ready to part with him.

"You're too young, boy," said Margaret Leonard. "Can't you persuade your father to wait another year? You're only a child in years, Eugene. You have all the time in the world." Her eyes darkened as she talked.

Gant would not be persuaded.

"He's old enough," he said. "When I was his age I had been earning my living for years. I'm getting old. I won't be here much longer. I want him to begin to make a name for himself before I die."

He refused stubbornly to consider any postponement. In his youngest son he saw the last hope of his name's survival in laurels—in the political laurels he so valued. He wanted his son to be a great and far-seeing statesman and a member of the Republican or Democratic party. His choice of a university was therefore a measure of political expediency, founded upon the judgment of his legal and political friends.

"He's ready to go," said Gant, "and he's going to the State University, and nowhere else. He'll be given as good an education there as he can get anywhere. Furthermore, he will make friends there who will stand by him the rest of his life." He turned upon his son a glance of bitter reproach. "There are very few boys who have had your chance," said he, "and you ought to be grateful instead of turning up your nose at it. Mark my words, you'll live to see the day when you'll thank me for sending you there. Now, I've given you my last word: you'll go where I send you or you'll go nowhere at all."

PART III

XXVIII

Eugene was not quite sixteen years old when he was sent away to the university. He was, at the time, over six feet and three inches tall, and weighed perhaps 130 pounds. He had been sick very little in his life, but his rapid growth had eaten sharply at his strength: he was full of a wild energy of mind and body that devoured him and left him exhausted. He tired very quickly.

He was a child when he went away: he was a child who had looked much on pain and evil, and remained a fantasist of the Ideal. Walled up in his great city of visions, his tongue had learned to mock, his lip to sneer, but the harsh rasp of the world had worn no grooving in the secret life. Again and again he had been bogged in the gray slough of factuality. His cruel eyes had missed the meaning of no gesture, his packed and bitter heart had sweltered in him like a hot ingot, but all his hard wisdom melted at the glow of his imagination. He was not a child when he reflected, but when he dreamt, he was; and it was the child and dreamer that governed his belief. He belonged, perhaps, to an older and simpler race of men: he belonged with the Mythmakers. For him, the sun was a lordly lamp to light him on his grand adventuring. He believed in brave heroic lives. He believed in the fine flowers of tenderness and gentleness he had little known. He believed in beauty and in order, and that he would wreak out their mighty forms upon the distressful chaos of his life. He believed in love, and in the goodness and glory of women. He believed in valiance, and he hoped that, like Socrates, he would do nothing mean or common in the hour of danger. He exulted in his youth, and he believed that he could never die.

Four years later, when he was graduated, he had passed his adolescence, the kiss of love and death burned on his lips, and he was still a child.

When it was at last plain that Gant's will was on this inflexible, Margaret Leonard had said, quietly:

"Well, then, go your ways, boy. Go your ways. God bless you."

She looked a moment at his long thin figure and turned to John Dorsey Leonard with wet eyes:

"Do you remember that shaver in knee-pants who came to us four years ago? Can you believe it?"

John Dorsey Leonard laughed quietly, with weary gentle relaxation.

"What do you know about it?" he said.

When Margaret turned to him again her voice, low and gentle, was charged with the greatest passion he had ever heard in it.

"You are taking a part of our heart with you, boy. Do you know that?"

She took his trembling hand gently between her own lean fingers. He lowered his head and closed his eyelids tightly.

"Eugene," she continued, "we could not love you more if you were our own child. We wanted to keep you with us for another year, but since that cannot be, we are sending you out with our hopes pinned to you. Oh, boy, you are fine. There is no atom in you that is not fine. A glory and a chrism of bright genius rest upon you. God bless you: the world is yours."

The proud words of love and glory sank like music to his heart, evoking their bright pictures of triumph, and piercing him with the bitter shame of his concealed desires. Love bade him enter, but his soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.

He tore his hand from her grasp, clinching, with the strangled cry of an animal, his convulsive throat.

"I can't!" he choked. "You mustn't think—" He could not go on; his life groped blindly to confessional.

Later, after he left her, her light kiss upon his cheek, the first she had ever given him, burned like a ring of fire.

That summer he was closer to Ben than ever before. They occupied the same room at Woodson Street. Luke had returned to the Westinghouse plant at Pittsburgh after Helen's marriage.

Gant still occupied his sitting-room, but the rest of the house he had rented to a sprightly gray-haired widow of forty. She looked after them beautifully, but she served Ben with an especial tenderness. At night, on the cool veranda, Eugene would find them below the ripening clusters, hear the quiet note of his brother's voice, his laugh, see the slow red arc of his cigarette in darkness.

The quiet one was more quiet and morose than he had ever been before: he stalked through the house scowling ferociously. All his conversation with Eliza was short and bitterly scornful; with Gant he spoke hardly at all. They had never talked together. Their eyes never met—a great shame, the shame of father and son, that mystery that goes down beyond motherhood, beyond life, that mysterious shame that seals the lips of all men, and lives in their hearts, had silenced them.

But to Eugene, Ben talked more freely than ever before. As they sat upon their beds at night, reading and smoking before they slept, all of the pain and bitterness of Benjamin Gant's life burst out in violent denunciation. He began to speak with slow sullen difficulty, halting over his words as he did when he read, but speaking more rapidly as his quiet voice became more passionate.

"I suppose they've told you how poor they are?" he began, tossing his cigarette away.

"Well," said Eugene, "I've got to go easy. I mustn't waste my money."

"Ah-h!" said Ben, making an ugly face. He laughed silently, with a thin and bitter contortion of his lips.

"Papa said that a lot of boys pay their own way through college by waiting on tables and so on. Perhaps I can do something like that."

Ben turned over on his side until he faced his brother, propping himself on his thin hairy forearm.

"Now listen, 'Gene," he said sternly, "don't be a damned little fool, do you hear? You take every damn cent you can get out of them," he added savagely.

"Well, I appreciate what they're doing. I'm getting a lot more than the rest of you had. They're doing a lot for me," said the boy.

"For *you,* you little idiot!" said Ben, scowling at him in disgust. "They're doing it all for themselves. Don't let them get away with that. They think you'll make good and bring a lot of credit to them some day. They're rushing you into it two years too soon, as it is. No, you take everything you can get. The rest of us never had anything, but I want to see you get all that's coming to you. My God!" he cried furiously. "Their money's doing no one any good rotting in the damned bank, is it? No, 'Gene, get all you can. When you get down there, if you find you need more to hold your own with the other boys, make the old man give it to you. You've never had a chance to hold your head up in your own home town, so make the most of your chances when you get away."

He lighted a cigarette and smoked in bitter silence for a moment.

"To hell with it all!" he said. "What in God's name are we living for!"

Eugene's first year at the university was filled for him with loneliness, pain, and failure. Within three weeks of his matriculation, he had been made the dupe of a half-dozen classic jokes, his ignorance of all campus tradition had been exploited, his gullibility was a byword. He was the greenest of all green freshmen, past and present: he had listened attentively to a sermon in chapel by a sophomore with false whiskers; he had prepared studiously for an examination on the contents of the college catalogue; and he had been guilty of the inexcusable blunder of making a speech of acceptance on his election, with fifty others, to the literary society.

And these buffooneries—a little cruel, but only with the cruelty of vacant laughter, and a part of the schedule of rough humor in an American college—salty, extravagant, and national—opened deep wounds in him, which his companions hardly suspected. He was conspicuous at once not only because of his blunders, but also because of his young wild child's face, and his great raw length of body, with the bounding scissor legs. The undergraduates passed him in grinning clusters: he saluted them obediently, but with a sick heart. And the smug smiling faces of his own classmen, the wiser Freshmen, complacently guiltless of his own mistakes, touched him at moments with insane fury.

"Smile and smile and s-mile—damn you!" he cursed through his grating teeth. For the first time in his life he began to dislike whatever fits too snugly in a measure. He began to dislike and envy the inconspicuous mould of general nature—the multitudinous arms, legs, hands, feet, and figures that are comfortably shaped for ready-made garments. And the prettily regular, wherever he found it, he hated—the vacantly handsome young men, with shining hair, evenly parted in the middle, with sure strong middling limbs meant to go gracefully on dance-floors. He longed to see them commit some awkward blunder—to trip and sprawl, to be flatulent, to lose a strategic button in mixed company, to be unconscious of a hanging shirt-tail while with a pretty girl. But they made no mistakes.

As he walked across the campus, he heard his name called mockingly from a dozen of the impartial windows, he heard the hidden laughter, and he ground his teeth. And at night, he stiffened with shame in his dark bed, ripping the sheet between his fingers as, with the unbalanced vision, the swollen egotism of the introvert, the picture of a crowded student-room, filled with the grinning historians of his exploits, burned in his brain. He strangled his fierce cry with a taloned hand. He wanted to blot out the shameful moment, unweave the loom. It seemed to him that his ruin was final, that he had stamped the beginning of his university life with folly that would never be forgotten, and that the best he could do would be to seek out obscurity for the next four years. He saw himself in his clown's trappings and thought of his former vision of success and honor with a lacerating self-contempt.

There was no one to whom he could turn: he had no friends. His conception of university life was a romantic blur, evoked from his reading and tempered with memories of Stover at Yale, Young Fred Fearnot, and jolly youths with affectionate linked arms, bawling out a cheer-song. No one had given him even the rudimentary data of the somewhat rudimentary life of an American university. He had not been warned of the general taboos. Thus, he had come greenly on his new life, unprepared, as he came ever thereafter on all new life, save for his opium visions of himself a stranger in Arcadias.

He was alone. He was desperately lonely.

But the university was a charming, an unforgettable place. It was situated in the little village of Pulpit Hill, in the central midland of the big State. Students came and departed by motor from the dreary tobacco town of Exeter, twelve miles away: the countryside was raw, powerful, and ugly, a rolling land of field, wood, and hollow; but the university itself was buried in a pastoral wilderness, on a long tabling butte, which rose steeply above the country. One burst suddenly, at the hill-top, on the end of the straggling village street, flanked by faculty houses, and winding a mile in to the town centre and the university. The central campus sloped back and up over a broad area of rich turf, groved with magnificent ancient trees. A quadrangle of post-Revolutionary buildings of weathered brick bounded the upper end: other newer buildings, in the modern bad manner (the Pedagogic Neo-Greeky), were scattered around beyond the central design: beyond, there was a thickly forested wilderness. There was still a good flavor of the wilderness about the place—one felt its remoteness, its isolated charm. It seemed to Eugene like a provincial outpost of great Rome: the wilderness crept up to it like a beast.

Its great poverty, its century-long struggle in the forest, had given the university a sweetness and a beauty it was later to forfeit. It had the fine authority of provincialism—the provincialism of an older South. Nothing mattered but the State: the State was a mighty empire, a rich kingdom—there was, beyond, a remote and semi-barbaric world.

Few of the university's sons had been distinguished in the nation's life—there had been an obscure President of The United States, and a few Cabinet members, but few had sought such distinction: it was glory enough to be a great man in one's State. Nothing beyond mattered very much.

In this pastoral setting a young man was enabled to loaf comfortably and delightfully through four luxurious and indolent years. There was, God knows, seclusion enough for monastic scholarship, but the rare romantic quality of the atmosphere, the prodigal opulence of Springtime, thick with flowers and drenched in a fragrant warmth of green shimmering light, quenched pretty thoroughly any incipient rash of bookishness. Instead, they loafed and invited their souls or, with great energy and enthusiasm, promoted the affairs of glee-clubs, athletic teams, class politics, fraternities, debating societies, and dramatic clubs. And they talked—always they talked, under the trees, against the ivied walls, assembled in their rooms, they talked—in limp sprawls—incessant, charming, empty Southern talk; they talked with a large easy fluency about God, the Devil, and philosophy, the girls, politics, athletics, fraternities and the girls— My God! how they talked!

"Observe," lisped Mr. Torrington, the old Rhode's Scholar (Pulpit Hill and Merton, '14), "observe how skilfully he holds suspense until the very end. Observe with what consummate art he builds up his climax, keeping his meaning hidden until the very last word." Further, in fact.

At last, thought Eugene, I am getting an education. This must be good writing, because it seems so very dull. When it hurts, the dentist says, it does you good. Democracy must be real, because it is so very earnest. It must be a certainty, because it is so elegantly embalmed in this marble mausoleum of language. Essays For College Men—Woodrow Wilson, Lord Bryce and Dean Briggs.

But there was no word here of the loud raucous voice of America, political conventions and the Big Brass Band, Tweed, Tammany, the Big Stick, lynching bees and black barbecue parties, the Boston Irish, and the damnable machinations of the Pope as exposed by the *Babylon Hollow Trumpet* (Dem.), the rape of the Belgian virgins, rum, oil, Wall Street and Mexico.

All that, Mr. Torrington would have said, was temporary and accidental. It was unsound.

Mr. Torrington smiled moistly at Eugene and urged him tenderly into a chair drawn intimately to his desk.

"Mr.—? Mr.—?—" he said, fumbling at his index cards.

"Gant," said Eugene.

"Ah, yes—Mr. Gant," he smiled his contrition. "Now—about your outside reading?" he began.

But what, thought Eugene, about my inside reading?

Did he like to read? Ah—that was good. He was so glad to hear it. The true university in these days, said Carlyle (he did hope Eugene like rugged old Thomas), was a collection of books.

"Yes, sir," said Eugene.

That, it seemed to him, was the Oxford Plan. Oh, yes—he had been there, three years, in fact. His mild eye kindled. To loaf along the High on a warm Spring day, stopping to examine in the bookseller's windows the treasures that might be had for so little. Then to Buol's or to a friend's room for tea, or for a walk in the meadows or Magdalen gardens, or to look down into the quad, at the gay pageant of youth below. Ah—Ah! A great place? Well—he'd hardly say that. It all depended what one meant by a great place. Half the looseness in thought—unfortunately, he fancied, more prevalent among American than among English youth—came from an indefinite exuberance of ill-defined speech.

"Yes, sir," said Eugene.

A great place? Well, he'd scarcely say that. The expression was typically American. Butter-lipped, he turned on the boy a smile of soft unfriendliness:

"It kills," he observed, "a man's useless enthusiasms."

Eugene whitened a little.

"That's fine," he said.

Now—let him see. Did he like plays—the modern drama? Excellent. They were doing some very interesting things in the modern drama. Barrie—oh, a charming fellow! What was that? Shaw!

"Yes, sir," said Eugene. "I've read all the others. There's a new book out."

"Oh, but really! My dear boy!" said Mr. Torrington with gentle amazement. He shrugged his shoulders and became politely indifferent. Very well, if he liked. Of course, he thought it rather a pity to waste one's time so when they were really doing some first-rate things. That was *just* the trouble, however. The appeal of a man like that was mainly to the unformed taste, the uncritical judgment. He had a flashy attraction for the immature. Oh, yes! Undoubtedly an amusing fellow. Clever—yes, but hardly significant. And—didn't he think—a trifle noisy? Or had he noticed that? Yes—there was to be sure an amusing Celtic strain, not without charm, but unsound. He was not in line with the best modern thought.

"I'll take the Barrie," said Eugene.

Yes, he rather thought that would be better.

"Well, good day. Mr.—Mr.—?—?" he smiled, fumbling again with his cards.

"Gant."

Oh yes, to be sure,—Gant. He held out his plump limp hand. He did hope Mr. Gant would call on him. Perhaps he'd be able to advise him on some of the little problems that, he knew, were constantly cropping up during the first year. Above all, he mustn't get discouraged.

"Yes, sir," said Eugene, backing feverishly to the door. When he felt the open space behind him, he fell through it, and vanished.

Anyway, he thought grimly, I've read all the damned Barries. I'll write the damned report for him, and damned well read what I damn well please.

God save our King and Queen!

He had courses besides in Chemistry, Mathematics, Greek and Latin.

He worked hard and with interest at his Latin. His instructor was a tall shaven man, with a yellow saturnine face. He parted his scant hair cleverly in such a way as to suggest horns. His lips were always twisted in a satanic smile, his eyes gleamed sideward with heavy malicious humor. Eugene had great hopes of him. When the boy arrived, panting and breakfastless, a moment after the class had settled to order, the satanic professor would greet him with elaborate irony: "Ah, there, Brother Gant! Just in time for church again. Have you slept well?"

The class roared its appreciation of these subtleties. And later, in an expectant pause, he would deepen his arched brows portentously, stare up mockingly under his bushy eyebrows at his expectant audience, and say, in a deep sardonic voice:

"And now, I am going to request Brother Gant to favor us with one of his polished and scholarly translations."

These heavy jibes were hard to bear because, of all the class, two dozen or more, Brother Gant was the only one to prepare his work without the aid of a printed translation. He worked hard on Livy and Tacitus, going over the lesson several times until he had dug out a smooth and competent reading of his own. This he was stupid enough to deliver in downright fashion, without hesitation, or a skilfully affected doubt here and there. For his pains and honesty he was handsomely rewarded by the Amateur Diabolist. The lean smile would deepen as the boy read, the man would lift his eyes significantly to the grinning class, and when it was over, he would say:

"Bravo, Brother Gant! Excellent! Splendid! You are riding a good pony—but a little too smoothly, my boy. You ride a little too well."

The class sniggered heavily.

When he could stand it no longer, he sought the man out one day after the class.

"See here, sir! See here!" he began in a voice choking with fury and exasperation. "Sir—I assure you—" he thought of all the grinning apes in the class, palming off profitably their stolen translations, and he could not go on.

The Devil's Disciple was not a bad man· he was only, like most men who pride themselves on their astuteness, a foolish one.

"Nonsense, Mr. Gant," said he kindly. "You don't think you can fool me on a translation, do you? It's all right with me, you know," he continued, grinning. "If you'd rather ride a pony than do your own work, I'll give you a passing grade—so long as you do it well."

"But—" Eugene began explosively.

"But I think it's a pity, Mr. Gant," said the professor, gravely, "that you're willing to slide along this way. See here, my boy, you're capable of doing first-rate work. I can see that.

Why don't you make an effort? Why don't you buckle down and really study, after this?"

Eugene stared at the man, with tears of anger in his eyes. He sputtered but could not speak. But suddenly, as he looked down into the knowing leer, the perfect and preposterous injustice of the thing—like a caricature—overcame him: he burst into an explosive laugh of rage and amusement which the teacher, no doubt, accepted as confession.

"Well, what do you say?" he asked. "Will you try?"

"All right! Yes!" the boy yelled. "I'll try it."

He bought at once a copy of the translation used by the class. Thereafter, when he read, faltering prettily here and there over a phrase, until his instructor should come to his aid, the satanic professor listened gravely and attentively, nodding his head in approval from time to time, and saying, with great satisfaction, when he had finished: "Good, Mr. Gant. Very good. That shows what a little real work will do."

And privately, he would say: "You see the difference, don't you? I knew at once when you stopped using that pony. Your translation is not so smooth, but it's your own now. You're doing good work, my boy, and you're getting something out of it. It's worth it, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Eugene gratefully, "it certainly is——"

By far the most distinguished of his teachers this first year was Mr. Edward Pettigrew ("Buck") Benson, the Greek professor. Buck Benson was a little man in the middle-forties, a bachelor, somewhat dandified, but old-fashioned, in his dress. He wore wing collars, large plump cravats, and suede-topped shoes. His hair was thick, heavily grayed, beautifully kept. His face was courteously pugnacious, fierce, with large yellow bulging eyeballs, and several bulldog pleatings around the mouth. It was an altogether handsome ugliness.

His voice was low, lazy, pleasant, with an indolent drawl, but without changing its pace or its inflection he could flay a victim with as cruel a tongue as ever wagged, and in the next moment wipe out hostility, restore affection, heal all wounds by the same agency. His charm was enormous. Among the students he was the subject for comical speculation—in their myths, they made of him a passionate and sophisticated lover, and his midget cyclecar, which bounded like an overgrown toy around the campus, the scene of many romantic seductions.

He was a good Grecian—an elegant indolent scholar. Under his instruction Eugene began to read Homer. The boy knew little grammar—he had learned little at Leonard's—but, since he had had the bad judgment to begin Greek under some one other than Buck Benson, Buck Benson thought he knew even less than he did. He studied desperately, but the bitter dyspeptic gaze of the elegant little man frightened him into halting, timorous, clumsy performances. And as he proceeded, with thumping heart and tremulous voice, Buck Benson's manner would become more and more weary, until finally, dropping his book, he would drawl:

"Mister Gant, you make me so damned mad I could throw you out the window."

But, on the examination, he gave an excellent performance, and translated from sight beautifully. He was saved. Buck Benson commended his paper publicly with lazy astonishment, and gave him a fair grade. Thereafter, they slipped quickly into an easier relation: by Spring, he was reading Euripides with some confidence.

But that which remained most vividly, later, in the drowning years which cover away so much of beauty, was the vast sea-surge of Homer which beat in his brain, his blood, his pulses, as did the sea-sound in Gant's parlor shells, when first he heard it to the slowly pacing feet and the hexametrical drawl of Buck Benson, the lost last weary son of Hellas.

Dwaney de clangay genett, argereoyo beeoyo—above the whistle's shriek, the harsh scream of the wheel, the riveter's tattoo, the vast long music endures, and ever shall. What dissonance can quench it? What jangling violence can disturb or conquer it—entombed in our flesh when we were young, remembered like "the apple tree, the singing, and the gold"?

XXIX

Before his first year was ended, the boy had changed his lodging four or five times. He finished the year living alone in a big bare carpetless room—an existence rare at Pulpit Hill, where the students, with very few exceptions, lived two or three to a room. In that room began a physical isolation, hard enough to bear at first, which later became indispensable to him, mind and body.

He had come to Pulpit Hill with Hugh Barton, who met him at Exeter and drove him over in the big roadster. After his registration, he had secured lodging quickly at the house of an Altamont widow whose son was a student. Hugh Barton looked relieved and departed, hoping to reach home and his bride by nightfall.

With fine enthusiasm, but poor judgment, Eugene paid the widow two months in advance. Her name was Bradley: she was a flabby petulant woman with a white face and heart-disease. But her food was excellent. Mrs. Bradley's student son answered to his initial letters—"G. T." G. T. Bradley, a member of the sophomore class, was a surly scowling youth of nineteen—a mixture, in equal parts, of servility and insolence. His chief, but thwarted, ambition was to be elected to membership in a fraternity. Having failed to win recognition by the exercise of his natural talents, he was driven by an extraordinary obsession that fame and glory would come to him if he were known as the slave-driver of a number of Freshmen.

But these tactics, tried on Eugene, produced at once defiance and resentment. Their hostility was bitter: G. T. set himself to thwart and ruin the beginnings of the boy's university life. He trapped him into public blunders, and solicited audiences to witness his humiliation; he wheedled his confidence, and betrayed it. But there is a final mockery, an ultimate treachery that betrays us into shame: our capacity for villainy, like all our other capacities, is so small. The day came when Eugene was free from bondage. He was free to leave the widow's house of sorrow. G. T. approached him, scowling, diffidently.

"I hear you're leaving us, 'Gene," he said.

"Yes," said Eugene.

"Is it because of the way I've acted?"

"Yes," said Eugene.

"You take things too seriously, 'Gene," he said.

"Yes," said Eugene.

"I don't want you to go having hard feelings, 'Gene. Let's shake hands and be friends."

He thrust his hand out stiffly. Eugene looked at the hard weak face, the furtive, unhappy eyes casting about for something they might call their own. The thick black hair was plastered stiff with grease; he saw white points of dandruff at the roots. There was an odor of talcum powder. He had been borne and nourished in the body of his white-faced mother—for what? To lap the scornful stroking fingers of position; to fawn miserably before an emblem. Eugene had a moment of nausea.

"Let's shake hands, 'Gene," said the boy once more, waggling his out-thrust fingers.

"No," said Eugene.

"You don't hate me, do you?" whined G. T.

"No," said Eugene.

He had a moment of pity, of sickness. He forgave because it was necessary to forget.

Eugene lived in a small world, but its ruins for him were actual. His misfortunes were trifling, but their effect upon his spirit was deep and calamitous. He withdrew deeply and scornfully into his cell. He was friendless, whipped with scorn and pride. He set his face blindly against all the common united life around him.

It was during this bitter and desperate autumn that Eugene first met Jim Trivett.

Jim Trivett, the son of a rich tobacco farmer in the eastern part of the State, was a good-tempered young tough of twenty years. He was a strong, rather foul-looking boy, with a coarse protruding mouth, full-meated and slightly ajar, constantly rayed with a faint loose smile and blotted at the corner with a brown smear of tobacco juice. He had bad teeth. His hair was light-brown, dry, and unruly: it stuck out in large untidy mats. He was dressed in the last cheap extreme of the dreadful fashion of the time: skin-tight trousers that ended an inch above his oxford shoes exposing an inch of clocked hose, a bobtailed coat belted in across his kidneys, large striped collars of silk. Under his coat he wore a big sweater with high-school numerals.

Jim Trivett lived with several other students from his community in a lodging-house near Mrs. Bradley's but closer to the west gate of the university. There were four young men banded together for security and companionship in two untidy rooms heated to a baking dryness by small cast-iron stoves. They made constant preparations for study, but they never studied: one would enter sternly, announcing that he had "a hell of a day to-morrow," and begin the most minute preparations for a long contest with his books: he would sharpen his pencils carefully and deliberately, adjust his lamp, replenish the red-hot stove, move his chair, put on an eyeshade, clean his pipe, stuff it carefully with tobacco, light, relight, and empty it, then, with an expression of profound relief, hear a rapping on his door.

"Come in the house, Goddamn it!" he would roar hospitably.

"Hello, 'Gene! Pull up a chair, son, and sit down," said Tom Grant. He was a thickly built boy, gaudily dressed; he had a low forehead, black hair, and a kind, stupid, indolent temper.

"Have you been working?"

"Hell, yes!" shouted Jim Trivett. "I've been working like a son-of-a-bitch."

"God!" said Tom Grant, turning slowly to look at him. "Boy, you're going to choke to death on one of those some day." He shook his head slowly and sadly, then continued with a rough laugh: "If old man Trivett knew what you were doing with his money, damn if he wouldn't bust a gut."

"'Gene!" said Jim Trivett, "what the hell do you know about this damned English, anyway?"

"What he doesn't know about it," said Tom Grant, "you could write out on the back of a postage stamp. Old man Sanford thinks you're hell, 'Gene."

"I thought you had Torrington," said Jim Trivett.

"No," said Eugene, "I wasn't English enough. Young and crude. I changed, thank God! What is it you want, Jim?" he asked.

"I've got a long paper to write. I don't know what to write about," said Jim Trivett.

"What do you want me to do? Write it for you?"

"Yes," said Jim Trivett.

"Write your own damn paper," said Eugene with mimic toughness, "I won't do it for you. I'll help you if I can."

"When are you going to let Hard Boy take you to Exeter?" said Tom Grant, winking at Jim Trivett.

Eugene flushed, making a defensive answer.

"I'm ready to go any time he is," he said uneasily.

"Look here, Legs!" said Jim Trivett, grinning loosely. "Do you really want to go with me or are you just bluffing?"

"I'll go with you! I've told you I'd go with you!" Eugene said angrily. He trembled a little.

Tom Grant grinned slyly at Jim Trivett.

"It'll make a man of you, 'Gene," he said. "Boy, it'll sure put hair on your chest." He laughed, not loudly, but uncontrollably, shaking his head as at some secret thought.

Jim Trivett's loose smile widened. He spat into the woodbox.

"Gawd!" he said. "They'll think Spring is here when they see old Legs. They'll need a stepladder to git at him."

Tom Grant was shaken with hard fat laughter.

"They sure God will!" he said.

"Well, what about it, 'Gene?" Jim Trivett demanded suddenly. "Is it a go? Saturday?"

"Suits me!" said Eugene.

When he had gone, they grinned thirstily at each other for a moment, the pleased corrupters of chastity.

"Pshaw!" said Tom Grant. "You oughtn't to do that, Hard Boy. You're leading the boy astray."

"It's not going to hurt him," said Jim Trivett. "It'll be good for him."

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, grinning.

"Wait a minute!" whispered Jim Trivett. "I think this is the place."

They had turned away from the centre of the dreary tobacco town. For a quarter of an hour they had walked briskly through drab autumnal streets, descending finally a long rutted hill that led them, past a thinning squalor of cheap houses, almost to the outskirts. It was three weeks before Christmas: the foggy air was full of chill menace. There was a brooding quietness, broken by far small sounds. They turned into a sordid little road, unpaved, littered on both sides with negro shacks and the dwellings of poor whites. It was a world of rickets. The road was unlighted. Their feet stirred dryly through fallen leaves.

They paused before a two-storey frame house. A lamp burned dimly behind lowered yellow shades, casting a murky pollen out upon the smoky air.

"Wait a minute," said Jim Trivett, in a low voice, "I'll find out."

They heard scuffling steps through the leaves. In a moment a negro man prowled up.

"Hello, John," said Jim Trivett, almost inaudibly.

"Evenin', boss!" the negro answered wearily, but in the same tone.

"We're looking for Lily Jones' house," said Jim Trivett. "Is this it?"

"Yes, suh," said the negro, "dis is it."

Eugene leaned against a tree, listening to their quiet conspiratorial talk. The night, vast and listening, gathered about him its evil attentive consciousness. His lips were cold and trembled. He thrust a cigarette between them and, shivering, turned up the thick collar of his overcoat.

"Does Miss Lily know you're comin'?" the negro asked.

"No," said Jim Trivett. "Do you know her?"

"Yes, suh," said the negro. "I'll go up dar wid yo'."

Eugene waited in the shadow of the tree while the two men went up to the house. They avoided the front veranda, and went around to the side. The negro rapped gently at a latticed door. There were always latticed doors. Why?

He waited, saying farewell to himself. He stood over his life, he felt, with lifted assassin blade. He was mired to his neck, inextricably, in complication. There was no escape.

There had been a faint closed noise from the house: voices and laughter, and the cracked hoarse tone of an old phonograph. The sound stopped quickly as the negro rapped: the shabby house seemed to listen. In a moment, a hinge creaked stealthily: he caught the low startled blur of a woman's voice. Who is it? Who?

In another moment, Jim Trivett returned to him, and said quietly:

"It's all right, 'Gene. Come on."

He slipped a coin into the negro's hand, thanking him. Eugene looked for a moment into the black broad friendliness of the man's face. He had a flash of warmth through his cold limbs. The black bawd had done his work eagerly and kindly: over their bought unlovely loves lay the warm shadow of his affection.

They ascended the path quietly and, mounting two or three steps, went in under the latticed door. A woman stood beside it, holding it open. When they had entered, she closed it securely. Then they crossed the little porch and entered the house.

They found themselves in a little hall which cleft the width of the house. A smoky lamp, wicked low, cast its dim circle into the dark. An uncarpeted stair mounted to the second floor. There were two doors both to left and right, and an accordion hat-rack, on which hung a man's battered felt hat.

Jim Trivett embraced the woman immediately, grinning, and fumbling in her breast.

"Hello, Lily," he said.

"Gawd!" She smiled crudely, and continued to peer at Eugene, curious at what the maw of night had thrown in to her. Then, turning to Jim Trivett with a coarse laugh, she said:

"Lord a' mercy! Any woman that gits him will have to cut off some of them legs."

"I'd like to see him with Thelma," said Jim Trivett, grinning.

Lily Jones laughed hoarsely. The door to the right opened and Thelma, a small woman, slightly built, came out, followed by high empty yokel laughter. Jim Trivett embraced her affectionately.

"My Gawd!" said Thelma, in a tinny voice. "What've we got here?" She thrust out her sharp wrenny face, and studied Eugene insolently.

"I brought you a new beau, Thelma," said Jim Trivett.

"Ain't he the lankiest feller you ever seen?" said Lily Jones impersonally. "How tall are you, son?" she added, addressing him in a kind drawl.

He winced a little.

"I don't know," he said. "I think about six three."

"He's more than that!" said Thelma positively. "He's seven foot tall or I'm a liar."

"He hasn't measured since last week," said Jim Trivett. "He can't be sure about it."

"He's young, too," said Lily, staring at him intently. "How old are you, son?"

Eugene turned his pallid face away, indefinitely.

"Why," he croaked, "I'm about——"

"He's going on eighteen," said Jim Trivett loyally. "Don't you worry about him. Old Legs knows all the ropes, all right. He's a bearcat. I wouldn't kid you. He's been there."

"He don't look that old," said Lily doubtfully. "I wouldn't call him more'n fifteen, to look at his face. Ain't he got a little face, though?" she demanded in a slow puzzled voice.

"It's the only one I've got," said Eugene angrily. "Sorry I can't change it for a larger one."

"It looks so funny stickin' way up there above you," she went on patiently.

Thelma nudged her sharply.

"That's because he's got a big frame," she said. "Legs is all right. When he begins to fill out an' put some meat on them bones he's goin' to make a big man. You'll be a heartbreaker sure, Legs," she said harshly, taking his cold hand and squeezing it. In him the ghost, his stranger, turned grievously away. O God! I shall remember, he thought.

"Well," said Jim Trivett, "let's git goin'." He embraced Thelma again. They fumbled amorously.

"You go on upstairs, son," said Lily. "I'll be up in a minute. The door's open."

"See you later, 'Gene," said Jim Trivett. "Stay with them, son."

He hugged the boy roughly with one arm, and went into the room to the left with Thelma.

Eugene mounted the creaking stairs slowly and entered the room with the open door. A hot mass of coals glowed flamelessly in the hearth. He took off his hat and overcoat and threw them across a wooden bed. Then he sat down tensely in a rocker and leaned forward, holding his trembling fingers to the heat. There was no light save that of the coals; but, by their dim steady glow, he could make out the old and ugly wall-paper, stained with long streaks of water rust, and scaling, in dry tattered scrolls, here and there. He sat quietly, bent forward, but he shook violently, as with an ague, from time to time. Why am I here? This is not I, he thought.

Presently he heard the woman's slow heavy tread upon the stairs: she entered in a swimming tide of light, bearing a lamp before her. She put the lamp down on a table and turned the wick. He could see her now more plainly. Lily was a middle-aged country woman, with a broad heavy figure, unhealthily soft. Her smooth peasant face was mapped with fine little traceries of wrinkles at the corners of mouth and eyes, as if she had worked much in the sun. She had black hair, coarse and abundant. She was whitely plastered with talcum powder. She was dressed shapelessly in a fresh loose dress of gingham, unbelted. She was dressed like a housewife, but she conceded to her profession stockings of red silk, and slippers of red felt, rimmed with fur, in which she walked with a flat-footed tread.

The woman fastened the door, and returned to the hearth where the boy was now standing. He embraced her with feverish desire, fondling her with his long nervous hands. Indecisively, he sat in the rocker and drew her down clumsily on his knee. She yielded her kisses with the coy and frigid modesty of the provincial harlot, turning her mouth away. She shivered as his cold hands touched her.

"You're cold as ice, son," she said. "What's the matter?"

She chafed him with rough embarrassed professionalism. In a moment she rose impatiently.

"Let's git started," she said. "Where's my money?"

He thrust two crumpled bills into her hand.

Then he lay down beside her. He trembled, unnerved and impotent. Passion was extinct in him.

The massed coals caved in the hearth. The lost bright wonder died.

When he went down stairs, he found Jim Trivett waiting in the hall, holding Thelma by the hand. Lily led them out quietly, after peering through the lattice into the fog, and listening for a moment.

"Be quiet," she whispered, "there's a man across the street. They've been watching us lately."

"Come again, Slats," Thelma murmured, pressing his hand.

They went out softly, treading gently until they reached the road. The fog had thickened: the air was saturated with fine stinging moisture.

At the corner, in the glare of the street-lamp, Jim Trivett released his breath with loud relief, and stepped forward boldly.

"Damn!" he said. "I thought you were never coming. What were you trying to do with the woman, Legs?" Then, noting the boy's face, he added quickly, with warm concern: "What's the matter, 'Gene? Don't you feel good?"

"Wait a minute!" said Eugene thickly. "Be all right!"

He went to the curb, and vomited into the gutter. Then he straightened, mopping his mouth with a handkerchief.

"How do you feel?" asked Jim Trivett. "Better?"

"Yes," said Eugene, "I'm all right now."

"Why didn't you tell me you were sick?" said Jim Trivett chidingly.

"It came on all of a sudden," said Eugene. He added presently: "I think it was something I ate at that damn Greek's to-night."

"I felt all right," said Jim Trivett. "A cup of coffee will fix you up," he added with cheerful conviction.

They mounted the hill slowly. The light from winking corner-lamps fell with a livid stare across the fronts of the squalid houses.

"Jim," said Eugene, after a moment's pause.

"Yes. What is it?"

"Don't say anything about my getting sick," he said awkwardly.

Surprised, Jim Trivett stared at him.

"Why not? There's nothing in that," he said. "Pshaw, boy, any one's likely to get sick."

"Yes, I know. But I'd rather you wouldn't."

"Oh, all right. I won't. Why should I?" said Jim Trivett.

Eugene was haunted by his own lost ghost: he knew it to be irrecoverable. For three days he avoided every one: the brand of his sin, he felt, was on him. He was published by every gesture, by every word. His manner grew more defiant, his greeting to life more unfriendly. He clung more closely to Jim Trivett, drawing a sad pleasure from his coarse loyal praise. His unappeased desire began to burn anew: it conquered his bodily disgust and made new pictures. At the end of the week he went again, alone, to Exeter. No more of him, he felt, could be lost. This time he sought out Thelma.

When he went home for Christmas, his loins were black with vermin. The great body of the State lay like a barren giant below the leaden reek of the skies. The train roared on across the vast lift of the Piedmont: at night, as he lay in his berth, in a diseased coma, it crawled up into the great fortress of the hills. Dimly, he saw their wintry bulk, with its bleak foresting. Below a trestle, silent as a dream, a white rope of water coiled between its frozen banks. His sick heart lifted in the haunting eternity of the hills. He was hillborn. But at dawn, as he came from the cars with the band of returning students, his depression revived. The huddle of cheap buildings at the station seemed meaner and nearer than ever before. The hills, above the station flats, with their cheap propped houses, had the unnatural closeness of a vision. The silent Square seemed to have rushed together during his absence, and as he left the car and descended the street to Dixieland, it was as if he devoured toy-town distances with a giant's stride.

The Christmas was gray and chill. Helen was not there to give it warmth. Gant and Eliza felt the depression of her absence. Ben came and went like a ghost. Luke was not coming home. And he himself was sick with shame and loss.

He did not know where to turn. He paced his chill room at night, muttering, until Eliza's troubled face appeared above her wrapper. His father was gentler, older than he had ever seen him: his pain had returned on him. He was absent and sorrowful. He talked perfunctorily with his son about college. Speech choked in Eugene's throat. He stammered a few answers and fled from the house and the vacant fear in Gant's eyes. He walked prodigiously, day and night, in an effort to command his own fear. He believed himself to be rotting with a leprosy. And there was nothing to do but rot. There was no cure. For such had been the instruction of the moralists of his youth.

He walked with aimless desperation, unable to quiet for a moment his restless limbs. He went up on the eastern hills that rose behind Niggertown. A winter's sun labored through the mist. Low on the meadows, and high on the hills, the sunlight lay on the earth like milk.

He stood looking. A shaft of hope cut through the blackness of his spirit. I will go to my brother, he thought.

He found Ben still in bed at Woodson Street, smoking. He closed the door, then spun wildly about as if caged.

"In God's name!" Ben cried angrily. "Have you gone crazy? What's wrong with you?"

"I'm—I'm sick!" he gasped.

"What's the matter? Where've you been?" asked Ben sharply. He sat up in bed.

"I've been with a woman," said Eugene.

"Sit down, 'Gene," said Ben quietly, after a moment. "Don't be a little idiot. You're not going to die, you know. When did this happen?"

The boy blurted out his confession.

Ben got up and put on his clothes.

"Come on," said he, "we'll go to see McGuire."

As they walked townward, he tried to talk, explaining himself in babbling incoherent spurts.

"It was like this," he began, "if I had known, but at that time I didn't—of course I know it was my own fault for——"

"Oh, for God's sake!" said Ben impatiently. "Dry up! I don't want to hear about it. I'm not your damned Guardian Angel."

The news was comforting. So many people, after our fall from grace, are.

They mounted to the wide dark corridor of the Doctors' and Surgeons', with its sharp excitement of medical smells. McGuire's anteroom was empty. Ben rapped at the inner door. McGuire opened it: he pulled away the wet cigarette that was plastered on his heavy lip, to greet them.

"Hello, Ben. Hello, son!" he barked, seeing Eugene. "When'd you get back?"

"He thinks he's dying of galloping consumption, McGuire," said Ben, with a jerk of the head. "You may be able to do something to prolong his life."

"What's the matter, son?" said McGuire.

Eugene gulped dryly, craning his livid face.

"If you don't mind," he croaked. "See you alone." He turned desperately upon his brother. "You stay here. Don't want you with me."

"I don't want to go with you," said Ben surlily. "I've got troubles enough of my own."

Eugene followed McGuire's burly figure into the office; McGuire closed the door, and sat down heavily at his littered desk.

"Sit down, son," he commanded, "and tell me about it." He lit a cigarette and stuck it deftly on his sag wet lip. He glanced keenly at the boy, noting his contorted face.

"Take your time, son," he said kindly, "and control yourself. Whatever it is, it's probably not as bad as you think."

"It was this way," Eugene began in a low voice. "I've made a mistake. I know that. I'm willing to take my medicine. I'm not making any excuses for what has happened," his voice rose sharply; he got half-way out of his chair, and began to pound fiercely upon the untidy desk. "I'm putting the blame on no one. Do you understand that?"

McGuire turned a bloated bewildered face slowly upon his patient. His wet cigarette sagged comically from his half-opened mouth.

"Do I understand what?" he said. "See here, 'Gene: what the hell are you driving at? I'm no Sherlock Holmes, you know. I'm your doctor. Spit it out."

The boy answered with a bitter writhen face.

"What I've done," he said dramatically, "thousands have done. Oh, I know they may pretend not to. But they do! You're a doctor—you know that. People high-up in society, too. I'm one of the unlucky ones. I got caught. Why am I any worse than they are? Why—" he continued rhetorically.

"I think I catch your drift," said McGuire dryly. "Let's have a look, son."

Eugene obeyed feverishly, still declaiming.

"Why should I bear the stigma for what others get away with? Hypocrites—a crowd of damned, dirty, whining hypocrites, that's what they are. The Double-Standard! Hah! Where's the justice, where's the honor of that? Why should I be blamed for what people in High Society——"

McGuire lifted his big head from its critical stare, and barked comically.

"Who's blaming you? You don't think you're the first one who ever had this sort of trouble, do you? There's nothing wrong with you, anyway."

"Can—can you cure me?" Eugene asked.

"No. You're incurable, son!" said McGuire. He scrawled a few hieroglyphics on a prescription pad. "Give this to the druggist," he said, "and be a little more careful hereafter of the company you keep. People in High Society, eh?" he grinned. "So that's where you've been?"

The great weight of blood and tears had lifted completely out of the boy's heart, leaving him dizzily buoyant, wild, half-conscious only of his rushing words.

He opened the door and went into the outer room. Ben got up quickly and nervously.

"Well," he said, "how much longer has he got to live?" Seriously, in a low voice, he added: "There's nothing wrong with him, is there?"

"No," said McGuire, "I think he's a little off his nut. But, then, you all are."

When they came out on the street again, Ben said:

"Have you had anything to eat?"

"No," said Eugene.

"When did you eat last?"

"Some time yesterday," said Eugene. "I don't remember."

"You damned fool!" Ben muttered. "Come on—let's eat."

The idea became very attractive. The world was washed pleasantly in the milky winter sunshine. The town, under the stimulus of the holidays and the returning students, had wakened momentarily from its winter torpor: warm brisk currents of life seethed over the pavements. He walked along at Ben's side with a great bounding stride, unable to govern the expanding joy that rose yeastily in him. Finally, as he turned in on the busy avenue, he could restrain himself no longer: he leaped high in the air, with a yelp of ecstasy:

"Squee-ee!"

"You little idiot!" Ben cried sharply. "Are you crazy!"

He scowled fiercely, then turned to the roaring passersby, with a thin smile.

"Hang on to him, Ben!" yelled Jim Pollock. He was a deadly little man, waxen and smiling under a black mustache, the chief compositor, a Socialist.

"If you cut off his damned big feet," said Ben, "he'd go up like a balloon."

They went into the big new lunch-room and sat at one of the tables.

"What's yours?" said the waiter.

"A cup of coffee and a piece of mince pie," said Ben.

"I'll take the same," said Eugene.

"Eat!" said Ben fiercely. "Eat!"

Eugene studied the card thoughtfully.

"Bring me some veal cutlets breaded with tomato sauce," he said, "with a side-order of hash-brown potatoes, a dish of creamed carrots and peas, and a plate of hot biscuits. Also a cup of coffee."

Eugene got back his heart again. He got it back fiercely and carelessly, with an eldritch wildness. During the remainder of his holiday, he plunged recklessly through the lively crowds, looking boldly but without insolence at the women and young girls. They grew unexpectedly out of the waste drear winter like splendid flowers. He was eager and alone. Fear is a dragon that lives among crowds—and in armies. It lives hardly with men who are alone. He felt released—beyond the last hedge of desperation.

Freed and alone, he looked with a boding detachment at all the possessed and possessing world about him. Life hung for his picking fingers like a strange and bitter fruit. *They*—the great clan huddled there behind the stockade for warmth and safety—could hunt him down some day and put him to death: he thought they would.

But he was not now afraid—he was content, if only the struggle might be fruitful. He looked among the crowds printed with the mark of his danger, seeking that which he might desire and take.

He went back to the university sealed up against the taunts of the young men: in the hot green Pullman they pressed about him with thronging jibe, but they fell back sharply, as fiercely he met them, with constraint.

There came and sat beside him Tom French, his handsome face vested in the hard insolence of money. He was followed by his court jester, Roy Duncan, the slave with the high hard cackle.

"Hello, Gant," said Tom French harshly. "Been to Exeter lately?" Scowling, he winked at grinning Roy.

"Yes," said Eugene, "I've been there lately, and I'm on my way there now. What's it to you, French?"

Discomfited by this hard defiance, the rich man's son drew back

"We hear you're stepping out among them, 'Gene," said Roy Duncan, cackling.

"Who's we?" said Eugene. "Who's them?"

"They say," said Tom French, "that you're as pure as the flowing sewer."

"If I need cleaning," said Eugene, "I can always use the Gold Dust Twins, can't I? French and Duncan, the Gold Dust Twins—who never do any work."

The cluster of grinning students, the young impartial brutes who had gathered above them on the seats back and front, laughed loudly.

"That's right! That's right! Talk to them, 'Gene!" said Zeno Cochran, softly. He was a tall lad of twenty, slender and powerful, with the grace of a running horse. He had punted against the wind for eighty yards in the Yale Bowl. He was a handsome fellow, soft-spoken and kindly, with the fearless gentleness of the athlete.

Confused and angry, with sullen boastfulness, Tom French said:

"Nobody has anything on me. I've been too slick for them. Nobody knows anything about me."

"You mean," said Eugene, "that every one knows all about you, and nobody wants to know anything about you."

The crowd laughed.

"Wow!" said Jimmy Revell.

"What about that, Tom?" he asked challengingly. He was very small and plump, the son of a carpenter, offensively worthy, working his way through college by various schemes. He was a "kidder," an egger-on, finding excuse for his vulgarity and malice in a false and loud good-humor.

Eugene turned quietly on Tom French. "Stop it!" he said. "Don't go on because the others are listening. I don't think it's funny. I don't like it. I don't like you. I want you to leave me alone now. Do you hear?"

"Come on," said Roy Duncan, rising, "leave him alone, Tom. He can't take a joke. He takes things too seriously."

They left him. Unperturbed, relieved, he turned his face toward the vast bleak earth, gray and hoary in the iron grip of winter.

Winter ended. The sleety frozen earth began to soften under thaw and the rain. The town and campus paths were dreary trenches of mud and slime. The cold rain fell: the grass shot up in green wet patches. He hurtled down the campus lanes, bounding along like a kangaroo, leaping high at the lower boughs to clip a budding twig with his teeth. He cried loudly in his throat—a whinnying squeal—the centaur-cry of man or beast, trying to unburden its overladen heart in one blast of pain and joy and passion. At other times he slouched by, depressed by an unaccountable burden of weariness and dejection.

He lost count of the hours—he had no sense of time—no regular periods for sleep, work, or recreation, although he attended his classes faithfully, and ate with fair regularity by compulsion of dining-hall or boarding-house schedules. The food was abundant, coarse, greasily and badly cooked. It was very cheap: at the college commons, twelve dollars a month; at the boarding-houses, fifteen. He ate at the commons for a month: his interest in food was too profound and too intelligent to stand it longer. The commons was housed in a large bleak building of white brick. It was called officially Stiggins Hall, but, in the more descriptive epithet of the students—The Sty.

He went to see Helen and Hugh Barton several times. They lived thirty-five miles away at Sydney, the State capital. It was a town of thirty thousand people, sleepy, with quiet leafy pavements, and a capitol Square in the centre, with radial streets. At the head of the main street, across from the capitol, a brown weathered building of lichened stone, was a cheap hotel—the largest and most notorious brothel in town. There were also three denominational colleges for young women.

The Bartons had rented quarters in an old house on the street above the Governor's Mansion. They lived in three or four rooms on the ground floor.

It was to Sydney that Gant had come, a young man, from Baltimore, on his slow drift to the South. It was in Sydney that he had first started business for himself and conceived, from the loss of his first investments, his hatred of property. It was in Sydney that he had met and wedded the sainted Cynthia, the tubercular spinstress who had died within two years of their marriage.

Their father's great ghost haunted them: it brooded over the town, above the scouring oblivion of the years that wipes all trace of us away.

Together, they hunted down into the mean streets, until they stood at length before a dreary shop on the skirts of the negro district.

"This must be it," she said. "His shop stood here. It's gone now."

She was silent a moment. "Poor old Papa." She turned her wet eyes away.

There was no mark of his great hand on this bleak world. No vines grew round the houses. That part of him which had lived here was buried—buried with a dead woman below the long gray tide of the years. They stood quietly, frightened, in that strange place, waiting to hear the summons of his voice, with expectant unbelief, as some one looking for the god in Brooklyn.

In April the nation declared war on Germany. Before the month was out, all the young men at Pulpit Hill who were eligible—those who were twenty-one—were going into service. At the gymnasium he watched the doctors examine them, envying them the careless innocence with which they stripped themselves naked. They threw off their clothes in indifferent heaps and stood, laughing and certain, before the doctors. They were clean-limbed, sound and white of tooth, graceful and fast in their movements. The fraternity men joined first—those merry and extravagant snobs of whom he had never known, but who now represented for him the highest reach of urbane and aristocratic life. He had seen them, happy and idle, on the wide verandas of their chapter houses—those temples where the last and awful rites of initiation were administered. He had seen them, always together, and from the herd of the uninitiated always apart, laughing over their mail at the post-office, or gambling for "black cows," at the drug store. And, with a stab of failure, with regret, with pain at his social deficiency, he had watched their hot campaigns for the favor of some desirable freshman—some one vastly more elegant than himself, some one with blood and with money. They were only the sons of the little rich men, the lords of the village and county, but as he saw them go so surely, with such laughing unconstraint, in well-cut clothes, well-groomed, well-brushed, among the crowd of humbler students, who stiffened awkwardly with peasant hostility and constraint, —they were the flower of chivalry, the sons of the mansion-house. They were Sydney, Raleigh, Nash. And now, like gentlemen, they were going to war.

The gymnasium was thick with the smell of steam and of sweating men coming in to the showers from the playing fields. Washed, with opened shirt, Eugene walked slowly away into the green budding shade of the campus, companioned by an acquaintance, Ralph Hendrix.

"Look!" said Ralph Hendrix, in a low angry tone. "Look at that, will you!" He nodded toward a group of students ahead. "That little Horse's Neck is booting the Dekes all over the campus."

Eugene looked, then turned to examine the bitter common face beside him. Every Saturday night, after the meeting of the literary society, Ralph Hendrix went to the drug-store and bought two cheap cigars. He had bent narrow shoulders, a white knobby face, and a low forehead. He spoke in a monotonous painful drawl. His father was foreman in a cotton mill.

"They're all Horse's Necks," he said. "They can go to hell before I'll boot to get in."

"Yes," said Eugene.

But he wanted to get in. He wanted to be urbane and careless. He wanted to wear well-cut clothes. He wanted to be a gentleman. He wanted to go to war.

On the central campus, several students who had been approved by the examining board, descended from the old dormitories, bearing packed valises. They turned down under the trees, walking toward the village street. From time to time they threw up an arm in farewell.

"So long, boys! See you in Berlin." The shining and dividing sea was closer and not so wide.

He read a great deal—but at random, for pleasure. He read Defoe, Smollet, Sterne, and Fielding—the fine salt of the English novel lost, during the reign of the Widow of Windsor, beneath an ocean of tea and molasses. He read the tales of Boccaccio, and all that remained of a tattered copy of the *Heptameron*. At Buck Benson's suggestion, he read Murray's *Euripides* (at the time he was reading the Greek text of the *Alcestis*—noblest and loveliest of all the myths of Love and Death). He saw the grandeur of the *Prometheus* fable—but the fable moved him more than the play of Æschylus. In fact, Æschylus he found sublime—and dull: he could not understand his great reputation. Rather—he could. He was Literature—a writer of masterpieces. He was almost as great a bore as Cicero—that windy old moralist who came out so boldly in favor of Old Age and Friendship. Sophocles was an imperial poet—he spoke like God among flashes of lightning: the *Œdipus Rex* is not only one of the greatest plays in the world, it is one of the greatest stories. This story—perfect, inevitable, and fabulous—wreaked upon him the nightmare coincidence of Destiny. It held him birdlike before its great snake-eye of wisdom and horror. And Euripides (whatever the disparagement of pedantry) he thought one of the greatest lyrical singers in all poetry.

He liked all weird fable and wild invention, in prose or verse, from the *Golden Ass* to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the chief prince of the moon and magic. But he liked the fabulous wherever he found it, and for whatever purpose.

The best fabulists have often been the greatest satirists: satire (as with Aristophanes, Voltaire, and Swift) is a high and subtle art, quite beyond the barnyard snipings and wholesale geese-slaughterings of the present degenerate age. Great satire needs the sustenance of great fable. Swift's power of invention is incomparable: there's no better fabulist in the world.

He read Poe's stories, *Frankenstein*, and the plays of Lord Dunsany. He read *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight* and the *Book of Tobit*. He did not want his ghosts and marvels explained. Magic was magic. He wanted old ghosts—not Indian ghosts, but ghosts in armor, the spirits of old kings, and pillioned ladies with high coned hats. Then, for the first time, he thought of the lonely earth he dwelt on. Suddenly, it was strange to him that he should read Euripides there in the wilderness.

Around him lay the village; beyond, the ugly rolling land, sparse with cheap farmhouses; beyond all this, America—more land, more wooden houses, more towns, hard and raw and ugly. He was reading Euripides, and all around him a world of white and black was eating fried food. He was reading of ancient sorceries and old ghosts, but did an old ghost ever come to haunt this land? The ghost of Hamlet's Father, in Connecticut,

> ". . . . . . I am thy father's spirit,
> Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
> Between Bloomington and Portland, Maine."

He felt suddenly the devastating impermanence of the nation. Only the earth endured—the gigantic American earth, bearing upon its awful breast a world of flimsy rickets. Only the earth endured—this broad terrific earth that had no ghosts to haunt it. Stogged in the desert, half-broken and overthrown, among the columns of lost temples strewn, there was no ruined image of Menkaura, there was no alabaster head of Akhnaton. Nothing had been done in stone. Only this earth endured, upon whose lonely breast he read Euripides. Within its hills he had been held a prisoner; upon its plain he walked, alone, a stranger.

O God! O God! We have been an exile in another land and a stranger in our own. The mountains were our masters: they went home to our eye and our heart before we came to five. Whatever we can do or say must be forever hillbound. Our senses have been fed by our terrific land; our blood has learned to run to the imperial pulse of America which, leaving, we can never lose and never forget. We walked along a road in Cumberland, and stooped, because the sky hung down so low; and when we ran away from London, we went by little rivers in a land just big enough. And nowhere that we went was far: the earth and the sky were close and near. And the old hunger returned—the terrible and obscure hunger that haunts and hurts

Americans, and that makes us exiles at home and strangers wherever we go.

Eliza visited Helen in Sydney in the Spring. The girl was quieter, sadder, more thoughtful than she had ever been. She was subdued by the new life: chastened by her obscurity. She missed Gant more than she would confess. She missed the mountain town.

"What do you have to pay for this place?" said Eliza, looking around critically.

"Fifty dollars a month," said Helen.

"Furnished?"

"No, we had to buy furniture."

"I tell you what, that's pretty high," said Eliza, "just for down stairs. I believe rents are lower at home."

"Yes, I know it's high," said Helen. "But good heavens, mama! Do you realize that this is the best neighborhood in town? We're only two blocks from the Governor's Mansion, you know. Mrs. Mathews is no common boarding-house keeper, I can assure you! No sir!" she exclaimed, laughing. "She's a real swell—goes to all the big functions and gets in the papers all the time. You know Hugh and I have got to try to keep up appearances. He's a young man just starting out here."

"Yes. I know," Eliza agreed thoughtfully. "How's he been doing?"

"O'Toole says he's the best agent he's got," said Helen. "Hugh's all right. We could get along together anywhere, as long as there's no damned family about. It makes me furious at times to see him slaving to feather O'Toole's pockets. He works like a dog. You know, O'Toole gets a commission on every sale he makes. And Mrs. O'T. and those two girls ride around in a big car and never turn their hands over. They're Catholics, you know, but they get to go everywhere."

"I tell you what," said Eliza with a timid half-serious smile, "it might not be a bad idea if Hugh became his own boss. There's no use doing it all for the other fellow. Say, child!" she exclaimed, "why wouldn't it be a good idea if he tried to get the Altamont agency? I don't believe that fellow they've got is much account. He could get it without trying."

There was a pause.

"We've been thinking of that," the girl admitted slowly. "Hugh has written in to the main office. Anyway," she said a moment later, "he'd be his own boss. That's something."

"Well," said Eliza slowly, "I don't know but what it'd be a good idea. If he works hard there's no reason why he shouldn't build a good business up. Your papa's been complaining here lately about his trouble. He'd be glad to have you back." She shook her head slowly for a moment. "Child! they didn't do him a bit of good, up there. It's all come back."

They drove over to Pulpit Hill at Easter for a two days' visit Eliza took him to Exeter and bought him a suit of clothes.

"I don't like those skimpy trousers," she told the salesman "I want something that makes him look more of a man."

When he was newly dressed, she puckered her lips, smiling, and said:

"Spruce up, boy! Throw your shoulders back! That's one thing about your father—he carries himself straight as an arrow. If you go all humped over like that, you'll have lung trouble before you're twenty-five."

"I want you to meet my mother," he said awkwardly to Mr. Joseph Ballantyne, a smooth pink young man who had been elected president of the Freshman class.

"You're a good smart-looking fellow," said Eliza smiling, "I'll make a trade with you. If you drum up some boarders for me among your friends here in this part of the State, I'll throw in your board free. Here are some of my cards," she added, opening her purse. "You might hand a few of them out, if you get a chance, and say a good word for Dixieland in the Land of the Sky."

"Yes, ma'am," said Mr. Ballantyne, in a slow surprised voice, "I certainly will."

Eugene turned a hot distressed face toward Helen. She laughed huskily, ironically, then turning to the boy, said:

"You're welcome at any time, Mr. Ballantyne, boarders or not. We'll always find a place for you."

When they were alone, in answer to his stammering and confused protests, she said with an annoyed grin:

"Yes, I know. It's pretty bad. But you're away from it most of the time. You're the lucky one. You see what I've had to listen to, the last week, don't you? You see, don't you?"

When he went home at the end of the year, late in May, he found that Helen and Hugh Barton had preceded him. They were living with Gant, at Woodson Street. Hugh Barton had secured the Altamont agency.

The town and the nation boiled with patriotic frenzy—violent, in a chaotic sprawl, to little purpose. The spawn of Attila must be crushed ("exterminated," said the Reverend Mr. Smallwood) by the sons of freedom. There were loans, bond issues, speech-making, a talk of drafts, and a thin trickle of Yankees into France. Pershing arrived in Paris, and said, "Lafayette, we are here!", but the French were still looking. Ben went up before the enlistment board and was rejected. "Lungs—weak!" they said quite definitely. "No—not tubercular. A tendency. Underweight." He cursed. His face was a little more like a blade—thinner, grayer. The cleft of his scowl was deeper. He seemed more alone.

Eugene came up into the hills again and found them in their rich young summer glory. Dixieland was partly filled by paying guests. More arrived.

Eugene was sixteen years old. He was a College Man. He walked among the gay crowd of afternoon with a sense of elation, answering the hearty greetings with joy, warming to its thoughtless bombast.

"They tell me you're batting a thousand down there, son," yelled Mr. Wood, the plump young pharmacist, who had been told nothing at all. "That's right, boy! Go get 'em." The man passed forward cheerfully, up the prosperous glade of his store. Fans droned.

After all, Eugene thought, he had not done so badly. He had felt his first wounds. He had not been broken. He had seen love's bitter mystery. He had lived alone.

XXX

THERE was at Dixieland a girl named Laura James. She was twenty-one years old. She looked younger. She was there when he came back.

Laura was a slender girl, of medium height, but looking taller than she was. She was very firmly moulded: she seemed fresh and washed and clean. She had thick hair, very straight and blonde, combed in a flat bracelet around her small head. Her face was white, with small freckles. Her eyes were soft, candid, cat-green. Her nose was a little too large for her face: it was tilted. She was not pretty. She dressed very simply and elegantly in short plaid skirts and waists of knitted silk.

She was the only young person at Dixieland. Eugene spoke to her with timid hauteur. He thought her plain and dull. But he began to sit with her on the porch at night. Somehow, he began to love her.

He did not know that he loved her. He talked to her arrogantly and boastfully as they sat in the wooden porch-swing. But he breathed the clean perfume of her marvellous young body. He was trapped in the tender cruelty of her clear green eyes, caught in the subtle net of her smile.

Laura James lived in the eastern part of the State, far east even of Pulpit Hill, in a little town built on a salt river of the great coastal plain. Her father was a wealthy merchant—a wholesale provisioner. The girl was an only child: she spent extravagantly.

Eugene sat on the porch rail one evening and talked to her. Before, he had only nodded, or spoken stiffly a word or two. They began haltingly, aware painfully of gaps in their conversation.

"You're from Little Richmond, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes," said Laura James, "do you know any one from there?"

"Yes," said he, "I know John Bynum and a boy named Ficklen. They're from Little Richmond, aren't they?"

"Oh, Dave Ficklen! Do you know him? Yes. They both go to Pulpit Hill. Do you go there?"

"Yes," he said, "that's where I knew them."

"Do you know the two Barlow boys? They're Sigma Nus," said Laura James.

He had seen them. They were great swells, football men.

"Yes, I know them," he said, "Roy Barlow and Jack Barlow."

"Do you know 'Snooks' Warren? He's a Kappa Sig."

"Yes. They call them Keg Squeezers," said Eugene.

"What fraternity are you?" said Laura James.

"I'm not any," he said painfully. "I was just a Freshman this year."

"Some of the best friends I have never joined fraternities," said Laura James.

They met more and more frequently, without arrangement, until by silent consent they met every night upon the porch. Sometimes they walked along the cool dark streets. Sometimes he squired her clumsily through the town, to the movies, and later, with the uneasy pugnacity of youth, past the loafing cluster at Wood's. Often he took her to Woodson Street, where Helen secured for him the cool privacy of the veranda. She was very fond of Laura James.

"She's a nice girl. A lovely girl. I like her. She's not going to take any beauty prizes, is she?" She laughed with a trace of good-natured ridicule.

He was displeased.

"She looks all right," he said. "She's not as ugly as you make out."

But she *was* ugly—with a clean lovely ugliness. Her face was freckled lightly, over her nose and mouth: her features were eager, unconscious, turned upward in irregular pertness. But she was exquisitely made and exquisitely kept: she had the firm young line of Spring, budding, slender, virginal. She was like something swift, with wings, which hovers in a wood—among the feathery trees suspected, but uncaught, unseen.

He tried to live before her in armor. He showed off before her. Perhaps, he thought, if he were splendid enough, she would not see the ugly disorder and meanness of the world he dwelt in.

Across the street, on the wide lawn of the Brunswick—the big brick gabled house that Eliza once had coveted—Mr. Pratt, who crawled in that mean world in which only a boarding-house husband can exist, was watering wide green spaces of lawn with a hose. The flashing water motes gleamed in the red glare of sunset. The red light fell across the shaven pinched face. It glittered on the buckles of his arm-bands. Across the walk, on the other lobe of grass, several men and women were playing croquet. There was laughter on the vine-hid porch. Next door, at the Belton, the boarders were assembled on the long porch in bright hash-house chatter. The comedian of the Dixie Ramblers arrived with two chorus girls. He was a little man, with the face of a weasel and no upper teeth. He wore a straw hat with a striped band, and a blue shirt and collar. The boarders gathered in around him. In a moment there was shrill laughter.

Julius Arthur sped swiftly down the hill, driving his father home. He grinned squintily and flung his arm up in careless greeting. The prosperous lawyer twisted a plump Van Dyked face on a wry neck curiously. Unsmiling, he passed.

A negress in the Brunswick struck on the several bells of a Japanese gong. There was a scramble of feet on the porch; the croquet players dropped their mallets and walked rapidly toward the house. Pratt wound his hose over a wooden reel.

A slow bell-clapper in the Belton sent the guests in a scrambling drive for the doors. In a moment there was a clatter of heavy plates and a loud foody noise. The guests on the porch at Dixieland rocked more rapidly, with low mutters of discontent.

Eugene talked to Laura in thickening dusk, sheeting his pain in pride and indifference. Eliza's face, a white blur in the dark, came up behind the screen.

"Come on out, Mrs. Gant, and get a breath of fresh air," said Laura James.

"Why no-o, child. I can't now. Who's that with you?" she cried, obviously flustered. She opened the door. "Huh? Heh? Have you seen 'Gene? Is it 'Gene?"

"Yes," he said. "What's the matter?"

"Come here a minute, boy," she said.

He went into the hall.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Why, son, what in the world! I don't know. You'll have to do something," she whispered, twisting her hands together.

"What is it, mama? What are you talking about?" he cried irritably.

"Why—Jannadeau's just called up. Your papa's on a rampage again and he's coming this way. Child! There's no telling what he'll do. I've all these people in the house. He'll ruin us." She wept. "Go and try to stop him. Head him off if you can. Take him to Woodson Street."

He got his hat quickly and ran through the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Laura James. "Are you going off without supper?"

"I've got to go to town," he said. "I won't be long. Will you wait for me?"

"Yes," she said.

He leaped down on the walk just as his father lurched in from the street by the high obscuring hedge that shut the house from the spacious yard of the attorney Hall. Gant reeled destructively, across a border of lilies, on to the lawn, and strode for the veranda. He stumbled, cursing, on the bottom step and plunged forward in a sprawl upon the porch. The boy jumped for him, and half dragged, half lifted his great drunken body erect. The boarders shrank into a huddle with a quick scattering of chairs: he greeted them with a laugh of howling contempt.

"Are you there? I say, are you there? The lowest of the low—boarding-house swine! Merciful God! What a travesty! A travesty on Nature! That it should come to this!"

He burst into a long peal of maniacal laughter.

"Papa! Come on!" said Eugene in a low voice. He took his father cautiously by the sleeve. Gant flung him half across the porch with a gesture of his hand. As he stepped in again swiftly, his father struck at him with a flailing arm. He evaded the great mowing fist without trouble, and caught the falling body, swung from its own pivot, in his arms. Then quickly, before Gant could recover, holding him from behind, he rushed him toward the door. The boarders scattered away like sparrows.

But Laura James was at the screen before him: she flung it open.

"Get away! Get away!" he cried, full of shame and anger. "You stay out of this." For a moment he despised her for seeing his hurt.

"Oh, let me help you, my dear," Laura James whispered. Her eyes were wet, but she was not afraid.

Father and son plunged chaotically down the wide dark hall, Eliza, weeping and making gestures, just before them.

"Take him in here, boy. Take him in here," she whispered, motioning to a large bed-room on the upper side of the house. Eugene propelled his father through a blind passage of bathroom, and pushed him over on the creaking width of an iron bed.

"You damned scoundrel!" Gant yelled, again trying to reap him down with the long arm, "let me up or I'll kill you!"

"For God's sake, papa," he implored angrily, "try to quiet down. Every one in town can hear you."

"To hell with them!" Gant roared. "Mountain Grills—all of them, fattening upon my heart's-blood. They have done me to death, as sure as there's a God in heaven."

Eliza appeared in the door, her face contorted by weeping.

"Son, can't you do something to stop him?" she said. "He'll ruin us all. He'll drive every one away."

Gant struggled to stand erect when he saw her. Her white face stirred him to insanity.

"There it is! There! There! Do you see! The fiend-face I know so well, gloating upon my misery. Look at it! Look! Do you see its smile of evil cunning? Greeley, Will, The Hog, The Old Major! The Tax Collector will get it all, and I shall die in the gutter!"

"If it hadn't been for me," Eliza began, stung to retaliation, "you'd have died there long ago."

"Mama, for God's sake!" the boy cried. "Don't stand there talking to him! Can't you see what it does to him! Do something, in heaven's name! Get Helen! Where is she?"

"I'll make an end to it all!" Gant yelled, staggering erect. "I'll do for us both now."

Eliza vanished.

"Yes, sir, papa. It's going to be all right," Eugene began soothingly, pushing him back on the bed again. He dropped quickly to his knees, and began to draw off one of Gant's soft tongueless shoes, muttering reassurances all the time: "Yes, sir. We'll get you some good hot soup and put you to bed in a jiffy. Everything's going to be all right," the shoe came off in his hand and, aided by the furious thrust of his father's foot, he went sprawling back.

Gant got to his feet again and, taking a farewell kick at his fallen son, lunged toward the door. Eugene scrambled up quickly, and leaped after him. The two men fell heavily into the roughly grained plaster of the wall. Gant cursed, flailing about clumsily at his tormentor. Helen came in.

"Baby!" Gant wept, "they're trying to kill me. O Jesus, do something to save me, or I perish."

"You get back in that bed," she commanded sharply, "or I'll knock your head off."

Very obediently he suffered himself to be led back to bed and undressed. In a few minutes she was sitting beside him with a bowl of smoking soup. He grinned sheepishly as she spooned it into his opened mouth. She laughed—almost happily—thinking of the lost and irrevocable years. Suddenly, before he slept, he lifted himself strongly from the pillows that propped him, and, with staring eyes, called out in savage terror:

"Is it a cancer? I say, is it a cancer?"

"Hush!" she cried. "No. Of course not! Don't be foolish."

He fell back exhausted, with eyes closed. But they knew that it was. He had never been told. The terrible name of his malady was never uttered save by him. And in his heart he knew—what they all knew and never spoke of before him—that it was, it was a cancer. All day, with fear-stark eyes, Gant had sat, like a broken statue, among his marbles, drinking. It was a cancer.

The boy's right hand bled very badly across the wrist, where his father's weight had ground it into the wall.

"Go wash it off," said Helen. "I'll tie it up for you."

He went into the dark bathroom and held his hand under a jet of lukewarm water. A very quiet despair was in his heart, a weary peace that brooded too upon the house of death and tumult, that flowed, like a soft exploring wind, through its dark halls, bathing all things quietly with peace and weariness. The boarders had fled like silly sheep to the two houses across the street: they had eaten there, they were clustered there upon the porches, whispering. And their going brought him peace and freedom, as if his limbs had been freed from a shackling weight. Eliza, amid the slow smoke of the kitchen, wept more quietly over the waste of supper; he saw the black mournful calm of the negress's face. He walked slowly up the dark hall, with a handkerchief tied loosely round his wound. He felt suddenly the peace that comes with despair. The sword that pierces very deep had fared through the folds of his poor armor of pride. The steel had shared his side, had bitten to his heart. But under his armor he had found himself. No more than himself could be known. No more than himself could be given. What he was—he was: evasion and pretense could not add to his sum With all his heart he was glad.

By the door, in the darkness, he found Laura James.

"I thought you had gone with the others," he said.

"No," said Laura James, "how is your father?"

"He's all right now. He's gone to sleep," he answered. "Have you had anything to eat?"

"No," she said, "I didn't want it."

"I'll bring you something from the kitchen," he said. "There's plenty there." In a moment he added: "I'm sorry, Laura."

"What are you sorry for?" she asked.

He leaned against the wall limply, drained of his strength at her touch.

"Eugene. My dear," she said. She pulled his drooping face down to her lips and kissed him. "My sweet, my darling, don't look like that."

All his resistance melted from him. He seized her small hands, crushing them in his hot fingers, and devouring them with kisses.

"My dear Laura! My dear Laura!" he said in a choking voice. "My sweet, my beautiful Laura! My lovely Laura. I love you, I love you." The words rushed from his heart, incoherent, unashamed, foaming through the broken levees of pride and silence. They clung together in the dark, with their wet faces pressed mouth to mouth. Her perfume went drunkenly to his brain; her touch upon him shot through his limbs a glow of magic; he felt the pressure of her narrow breasts, eager and lithe, against him with a sense of fear—as if he had dishonored her—with a sickening remembrance of his defilement.

He held between his hands her elegant small head, so gloriously wound with its thick bracelet of fine blonde hair, and spoke the words he had never spoken—the words of confession, filled with love and humility.

"Don't go! Don't go! Please don't go!" he begged. "Don't leave, dear. Please!"

"Hush!" she whispered. "I won't go! I love you, my dear."

She saw his hand, wrapped in its bloody bandage: she nursed it gently with soft little cries of tenderness. She fetched a bottle of iodine from her room and painted the stinging cut with a brush. She wrapped it with clean strips of fine white cloth, torn from an old waist, scented with a faint and subtle perfume.

Then they sat upon the wooden swing. The house seemed to sleep in darkness. Helen and Eliza came presently from its very quiet depth.

"How's your hand, 'Gene?" Helen asked.

"It's all right," he said.

"Let me see! O-ho, you've got a nurse now, haven't you?" she said, with a good laugh.

"What's that? What's that? Hurt his hand? How'd you do that? Why, here—say—I've got the very thing for it, son," said Eliza, trying to bustle off in all directions.

"Oh, it's all right now, mama. It's been fixed," he said wearily, reflecting that she had the very thing always too late. He looked at Helen grinning:

"God bless our Happy Home!" he said.

"Poor old Laura!" she laughed, and hugged the girl roughly with one hand. "It's too bad you have to be dragged into it."

"That's all right," said Laura. "I feel like one of the family now anyhow."

"He needn't think he can carry on like this," said Eliza resentfully. "I'm not going to put up with it any longer."

"Oh forget about it!" said Helen wearily. "Good heavens, mama. Papa's a sick man. Can't you realize that?"

"Pshaw!" said Eliza scornfully. "I don't believe there's a thing in the world wrong with him but that vile licker. All his trouble comes from that."

"Oh—how ridiculous! How ridiculous! You can't tell me!" Helen exclaimed angrily.

"Let's talk about the weather," said Eugene.

Then they all sat quietly, letting the darkness soak into them. Finally Helen and Eliza went back into the house: Eliza went unwillingly, at the girl's insistence, casting back the doubtful glimmer of her face upon the boy and girl.

The wasting helve of the moon rode into heaven over the bulk of the hills. There was a smell of wet grass and lilac, and the vast brooding symphony of the million-noted little night things, rising and falling in a constant ululation, and inhabiting the heart with steady unconscious certitude. The pallid light drowned out the stars, it lay like silence on the earth, it dripped through the leafy web of the young maples, printing the earth with swarming moths of elvish light.

Eugene and Laura sat with joined hands in the slowly creaking swing. Her touch shot through him like a train of fire: as he put his arm around her shoulders and drew her over to him, his fingers touched the live firm cup of her breast. He jerked his hand away, as if he had been stung, muttering an apology. Whenever she touched him, his flesh got numb and weak. She was a virgin, crisp like celery—his heart shrank away from the pollution of his touch upon her. It seemed to him that he was much the older, although he was sixteen, and she twenty-one. He felt the age of his loneliness and his dark perception. He felt the gray wisdom of sin—a waste desert, but seen and known. When he held her hand, he felt as if he had already seduced her. She lifted her lovely face to him, pert and ugly as a boy's; it was inhabited by a true and steadfast decency, and his eyes were wet. All the young beauty in the world dwelt for him in that face that had kept wonder, that had kept innocency, that had lived in such immortal blindness to the terror and foulness of the world. He came to her, like a creature who had travelled its life through dark space, for a moment of peace and conviction on some lonely planet, where now he stood, in the vast enchanted plain of moonlight, with moonlight falling on the moonflower of her face. For if a man should dream of heaven and, waking, find within his hand a flower as token that he had really been there—what then, what then?

"Eugene," she said presently, "how old are you?"

His vision thickened with his pulse. In a moment he answered with terrible difficulty.

"I'm—just sixteen."

"Oh, you child!" she cried. "I thought you were more than that!"

"I'm—old for my age," he muttered. "How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-one," she said. "Isn't it a pity?"

"There's not much difference," he said. "I can't see that it matters."

"Oh, my dear," she said. "It does! It matters so much!"

And he knew that it did—how much he did not know. But he had his moment. He was not afraid of pain, he was not afraid of loss. He cared nothing for the practical need of the world. He dared to say the strange and marvellous thing that had bloomed so darkly in him.

"Laura," he said, hearing his low voice sound over the great plain of the moon, "let's always love each other as we do now. Let's never get married. I want you to wait for me and to love me forever. I am going all over the world. I shall go away for years at a time; I shall become famous, but I shall always come back to you. You shall live in a house away in the mountains, you shall wait for me, and keep yourself for me. Will you?" he said, asking for her life as calmly as for an hour of her time.

"Yes, dear," said Laura in the moonlight, "I will wait for you forever."

She was buried in his flesh. She throbbed in the beat of his pulses. She was wine in his blood, a music in his heart.

"He has no consideration for you or any one else," Hugh Barton growled. He had returned late from work at his office, to take Helen home. "If he can't do better than this, we'll find a house of our own. I'm not going to have you get down sick on account of him."

"Forget about it," Helen said. "He's getting old."

They came out on the veranda.

"Come down to-morrow, honey," she said to Eugene. "I'll give you a real feed. Laura, you come too. It's not always like this, you know." She laughed, fondling the girl with a big hand.

They coasted away downhill.

"What a lovely girl your sister is," said Laura James. "Aren't you simply crazy about her?"

Eugene made no answer for a moment.

"Yes," he said.

"She is about you. Any one can see that," said Laura.

In the darkness he caught at his throat.

"Yes," he said.

The moon quartered gently across heaven. Eliza came out again, timidly, hesitantly.

"Who's there? Who's there?" she spoke into the darkness. "Where's 'Gene? Oh! I didn't know! Are you there, son?" She knew very well.

"Yes," he said.

"Why don't you sit down, Mrs. Gant?" asked Laura. "I don't see how you stand that hot kitchen all day long. You must be worn out."

"I tell you what!" said Eliza, peering dimly at the sky. "It's a fine night, isn't it? As the fellow says, a night for lovers." She laughed uncertainly, then stood for a moment in thought.

"Son," she said in a troubled voice, "why don't you go to bed and get some sleep? It's not good for you staying up till all hours like this."

"That's where I should be," said Laura James, rising.

"Yes, child," said Eliza. "Go get your beauty sleep. As the saying goes, early to bed and early to rise——"

"Let's all go, then. Let's all go!" said Eugene impatiently and angrily, wondering if she must always be the last one awake in that house.

"Why law, no!" said Eliza. "I can't, boy. I've all those things to iron."

Beside him, Laura gave his hand a quiet squeeze, and rose. Bitterly, he watched his loss.

"Good-night, all. Good-night, Mrs. Gant."

"Good-night, child."

When she had gone, Eliza sat down beside him, with a sigh of weariness.

"I tell you what," she said. "That feels good. I wish I had as much time as some folks, and could sit out here enjoying the air." In the darkness, he knew her puckering lips were trying to smile.

"Hm!" she said, and caught his hand in her rough palm. "Has my baby gone and got him a girl?"

"What of it? What if it were true?" he said angrily. "Haven't I a right as much as any one?"

"Pshaw!" said Eliza. "You're too young to think of them. I wouldn't pay any attention to them, if I were you. Most of them haven't an idea in the world except going out to parties and having a good time. I don't want my boy to waste his time on them."

He felt her earnestness beneath her awkward banter. He struggled in a chaos of confused fury, trying for silence. At last he spoke in a low voice, filled with his passion:

"We've got to have something, mama. We've got to have something, you know. We can't go on always alone—alone."

It was dark. No one could see. He let the gates swing open. He wept.

"I know!" Eliza agreed hastily. "I'm not saying——"

"My God, my God, where are we going? What's it all about? He's dying—can't you see it? Don't you know it? Look at his life. Look at yours. No light, no love, no comfort—nothing." His voice rose frantically: he beat on his ribs like a drum. "Mama, mama, in God's name, what is it? What do you want? Are you going to strangle and drown us all? Don't you own enough? Do you want more string? Do you want more bottles? By God, I'll go around collecting them if you say so." His voice had risen almost to a scream. "But tell me what you want. Don't you own enough? Do you want the town? What is it?"

"Why, I don't know what you're talking about, boy," said Eliza angrily. "If I hadn't tried to accumulate a little property none of you would have had a roof to call your own, for your papa, I can assure you, would have squandered everything."

"A roof to call our own!" he yelled, with a crazy laugh. "Good God, we haven't a bed to call our own. We haven't a room to call our own. We have not a quilt to call our own that might not be taken from us to warm the mob that rocks upon this porch and grumbles."

"Now, you may sneer at the boarders all you like—" Eliza began sternly.

"No," he said. "I can't. There's not breath or strength enough in me to sneer at them all I like."

Eliza began to weep.

"I've done the best I could!" she said. "I'd have given you a home if I could. I'd have put up with anything after Grover's death, but he never gave me a moment's peace. Nobody knows what I've been through. Nobody knows, child. Nobody knows."

He saw her face in the moonlight, contorted by an ugly grimace of sorrow. What she said, he knew, was fair and honest. He was touched deeply.

"It's all right, mama," he said painfully. "Forget about it! I know."

She seized his hand almost gratefully and laid her white face, still twisted with her grief, against his shoulder. It was the gesture of a child: a gesture that asked for love, pity, and tenderness. It tore up great roots in him, bloodily.

"Don't!" he said. "Don't, mama! Please!"

"Nobody knows," said Eliza. "Nobody knows. I need some one too. I've had a hard life, son, full of pain and trouble." Slowly, like a child again, she wiped her wet weak eyes with the back of her hand.

Ah, he thought, as his heart twisted in him full of wild pain and regret, she will be dead some day and I shall always remember this. Always this. This.

They were silent a moment. He held her rough hand tightly, and kissed her.

"Well," Eliza began, full of cheerful prophecy, "I tell you what: I'm not going to spend my life slaving away here for a lot of boarders. They needn't think it. I'm going to set back and take things as easy as any of them." She winked knowingly at him. "When you come home next time, you may find me living in a big house in Doak Park. I've got the lot—the best lot out there for view and location, far better than the one W. J. Bryan has. I made the trade with old Dr. Doak himself, the other day. Look here! What about it!" She laughed. "He said, 'Mrs. Gant, I can't trust any of my agents with you. If I'm to make anything on this deal, I've got to look out. You're the sharpest trader in this town.' 'Why, pshaw! Doctor,' I said (I never let on I believed him or anything), 'all I want is a fair return on my investment. I believe in every one making his profit and giving the other fellow a chance. Keep the ball a-rolling!' I said, laughing as big as you please. 'Why, Mrs. Gant!' he said—" She was off on a lengthy divagation, recording with an absorbed gusto the interminable minutia of her transaction with the worthy Quinine King, with the attendant phenomena, during the time, of birds, bees, flowers, sun, clouds, dogs, cows, and people. She was pleased. She was happy.

Presently, returning to an abrupt reflective pause, she said: "Well, I may do it. I want a place where my children can come to see me and bring their friends, when they come home."

"Yes," he said, "yes. That would be nice. You mustn't work all your life."

He was pleased at her happy fable: for a moment he almost believed in a miracle of redemption, although the story was an old one to him.

"I hope you do," he said. "It would be nice. . . . Go on to bed now, why don't you, mama? It's getting late." He rose. "I'm going now."

"Yes, son," she said, getting up. "You ought to. Well, good-night." They kissed with a love, for the time, washed clean of bitterness. Eliza went before him into the dark house.

But before he went to bed, he descended to the kitchen for matches. She was still there, beyond the long littered table, at her ironing board, flanked by two big piles of laundry. At his accusing glance she said hastily:

"I'm a-going. Right away. I just wanted to finish up these towels."

He rounded the table, before he left, to kiss her again. She fished into a button-box on the sewing-machine and dug out the stub of a pencil. Gripping it firmly above an old envelope, she scrawled out on the ironing board a rough mapping. Her mind was still lulled in its project.

"Here, you see," she began, "is Sunset Avenue, coming up the hill. This is Doak Place, running off here at right angles. Now this corner-lot here belongs to Dick Webster; and right here above it, at the very top is——"

Is, he thought, staring with dull interest, the place where the Buried Treasure lies. Ten paces N.N.E. from the Big Rock, at the roots of the Old Oak Tree. He went off into his delightful fantasy while she talked. What if there *was* a buried treasure on one of Eliza's lots? If she kept on buying, there might very well be. Or why not an oil-well? Or a coal-mine? These famous mountains were full (they said) of minerals. 150 Bbl. a day right in the backyard. How much would that be? At $3.00 a Bbl., there would be over $50.00 a day for every one in the family. The world is ours!

"You see, don't you?" she smiled triumphantly. "And right there is where I shall build. That lot will bring twice its present value in five years."

"Yes," he said, kissing her. "Good-night, mama. For God's sake, go to bed and get some sleep."

"Good-night, son," said Eliza.

He went out and began to mount the dark stairs. Benjamin Gant, entering at this moment, stumbled across a mission-chair in the hall. He cursed fiercely, and struck at the chair with his hand. Damn it! Oh damn it! Mrs. Pert whispered a warning behind him, with a fuzzy laugh. Eugene paused, then mounted softly the carpeted stair, so that he would not be heard, entering the sleeping-porch at the top of the landing on which he slept.

He did not turn on the light, because he disliked seeing the raw blistered varnish of the dresser and the bent white iron of the bed. It sagged, and the light was dim—he hated dim lights, and the large moths, flapping blindly around on their dusty wings. He undressed in the moon. The moonlight fell upon the earth like a magic unearthly dawn. It wiped away all rawness, it hid all sores. It gave all common and familiar things—the sagging drift of the barn, the raw shed of the creamery, the rich curve of the lawyer's crab-apple trees—a uniform bloom of wonder. He lighted a cigarette, watching its red glowing suspiration in the mirror, and leaned upon the rail of his porch, looking out. Presently, he grew aware that Laura James, eight feet away, was watching him. The moonlight fell upon them, bathing their flesh in a green pallor, and steeping them in its silence. Their faces were blocked in miraculous darkness, out of which, seeing but unseen, their bright eyes lived. They gazed at each other in that elfin light, without speaking. In the room below them, the light crawled to his father's bed, swam up the cover, and opened across his face, thrust sharply upward. The air of the night, the air of the hills, fell on the boy's bare flesh like a sluice of clear water. His toes curled in to grip wet grasses.

On the landing, he heard Mrs. Pert go softly up to bed, fumbling with blind care at the walls. Doors creaked and clicked. The house grew solidly into quiet, like a stone beneath the moon. They looked, waiting for a spell and the conquest of time. Then she spoke to him—her whisper of his name was only a guess at sound. He threw his leg across the rail, and thrust his long body over space to the sill of her window, stretching out like a cat. She drew her breath in sharply, and cried out softly, "No! No!" but she caught his arms upon the sills and held him as he twisted in.

Then they held each other tightly in their cool young arms, and kissed many times with young lips and faces. All her hair fell down about her like thick corn-silk, in a sweet loose wantonness. Her straight dainty legs were clad in snug little green bloomers, gathered in by an elastic above the knee.

They were locked limb to limb: he kissed the smooth sheen of her arms and shoulders—the passion that numbed his limbs was governed by a religious ecstasy. He wanted to hold her, and go away by himself to think about her.

He stooped, thrusting his arm under her knees, and lifted her up exultantly. She looked at him frightened, holding him more tightly.

"What are you doing?" she whispered. "Don't hurt me."

"I won't hurt you, my dear," he said. "I'm going to put you to bed. Yes. I'm going to put you to bed. Do you hear?" He felt he must cry out in his throat for joy.

He carried her over and laid her on the bed. Then he knelt beside her, putting his arm beneath her and gathering her to him.

"Good-night, my dear. Kiss me good-night. Do you love me?"

"Yes." She kissed him. "Good-night, my darling. Don't go back by the window. You may fall."

But he went, as he came, reaching through the moonlight exultantly like a cat. For a long time he lay awake, in a quiet delirium, his heart thudding fiercely against his ribs. Sleep crept across his senses with goose-soft warmth: the young leaves of the maples rustled, a cock sounded his distant elfin minstrelsy, the ghost of a dog howled. He slept.

He awoke with a high hot sun beating in on his face through the porch awnings. He hated to awake in sunlight. Some day he would sleep in a great room that was always cool and dark. There would be trees and vines at his windows, or the scooped-out lift of the hill. His clothing was wet with night-damp as he dressed. When he went downstairs he found Gant rocking miserably upon the porch, his hand gripped over a walking-stick.

"Good-morning," he said, "how do you feel?"

His father cast his uneasy flickering eyes on him, and groaned.

"Merciful God! I'm being punished for my sins."

"You'll feel better in a little," said Eugene. "Did you eat anything?"

"It stuck in my throat," said Gant, who had eaten heartily.

"I couldn't swallow a bite. How's your hand, son?" he asked very humbly.

"Oh, it's all right," said Eugene quickly. "Who told you about my hand?"

"She said I had hurt your hand," said Gant sorrowfully.

"Ah-h!" said the boy angrily. "No. I wasn't hurt."

Gant leaned to the side and, without looking, clumsily, patted his son's uninjured hand.

"I'm sorry for what I've done," he said. "I'm a sick man. Do you need money?"

"No," said Eugene, embarrassed. "I have all I need."

"Come to the office to-day, and I'll give you something," said Gant. "Poor child, I suppose you're hard up."

But instead, he waited until Laura James returned from her morning visit to the city's bathing-pool. She came with her bathing-suit in one hand, and several small packages in the other. More arrived by negro carriers. She paid and signed.

"You must have a lot of money, Laura?" he said. "You do this every day, don't you?"

"Daddy gets after me about it," she admitted, "but I love to buy clothes. I spend all my money on clothes."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Nothing—whatever you like. It's a lovely day to do something, isn't it?"

"It's a lovely day to do nothing. Would you like to go off somewhere, Laura?"

"I'd love to go off somewhere with you," said Laura James.

"That is the idea, my girl. That is the idea," he said exultantly, in throaty and exuberant burlesque. "We will go off somewhere alone—we will take along something to eat," he said lusciously.

Laura went to her room and put on a pair of sturdy little slippers. Eugene went into the kitchen.

"Have you a shoe-box?" he asked Eliza.

"What do you want that for?" she said suspiciously.

"I'm going to the bank," he said ironically. "I wanted something to carry my money in." But immediately he added roughly:

"I'm going on a picnic."

"Huh? Hah? What's that you say?" said Eliza. "A picnic? Who are you going with? That girl?"

"No," he said heavily, "with President Wilson, the King of England, and Dr. Doak. We're going to have lemonade—I've promised to bring the lemons."

"I'll vow, boy!" said Eliza fretfully. "I don't like it—your running off this way when I need you. I wanted you to make a deposit for me, and the telephone people will disconnect me if I don't send them the money to-day."

"O mama! For God's sake!" he cried annoyed. "You always need me when I want to go somewhere. Let them wait! They can wait a day."

"It's overdue," she said. "Well, here you are. I wish I had time to go off on picnics." She fished a shoe-box out of a pile of magazines and newspapers that littered the top of a low cupboard.

"Have you got anything to eat?"

"We'll get it," he said, and departed.

They went down the hill, and paused at the musty little grocery around the corner on Woodson Street, where they bought crackers, peanut butter, currant jelly, bottled pickles, and a big slice of rich yellow cheese. The grocer was an old Jew who muttered jargon into a rabbi's beard as if saying a spell against Dybbuks. The boy looked closely to see if his hands touched the food. They were not clean.

On their way up the hill, they stopped for a few minutes at Gant's. They found Helen and Ben in the dining-room. Ben was eating breakfast, bending, as usual, with scowling attention, over his coffee, turning from eggs and bacon almost with disgust. Helen insisted on contributing boiled eggs and sandwiches to their provision: the two women went back into the kitchen. Eugene sat at table with Ben, drinking coffee.

"O-oh my God!" Ben said at length, yawning wearily. He lighted a cigarette. "How's the Old Man this morning?"

"He's all right, I think. Said he couldn't eat breakfast."

"Did he say anything to the boarders?"

"'You damned scoundrels! You dirty Mountain Grills! Whee —!' That was all."

Ben snickered quietly.

"Did he hurt your hand? Let's see."

"No. You can't see anything. It's not hurt," said Eugene, lifting his bandaged wrist.

"He didn't hit you, did he?" asked Ben sternly.

"Oh, no. Of course not. He was just drunk. He was sorry about it this morning."

"Yes," said Ben, "he's always sorry about it—after he's raised all the hell he can." He drank deeply at his cigarette, inhaling the smoke as if in the grip of a powerful drug.

"How'd you get along at college this year, 'Gene?" he asked presently.

"I passed my work. I made fair grades—if that's what you mean? I did better—this Spring," he added, with some difficulty. "It was hard getting started—at the beginning."

"You mean last Fall?"

Eugene nodded.

"What was the matter?" said Ben, scowling at him. "Did the other boys make fun of you?"

"Yes," said Eugene, in a low voice.

"Why did they? You mean they didn't think you were good enough for them? Did they look down on you? Was that it?" said Ben savagely.

"No," said Eugene, very red in the face. "No. That had nothing to do with it. I look funny, I suppose. I looked funny to them."

"What do you mean you look funny?" said Ben pugnaciously. "There's nothing wrong with you, you know, if you didn't go around looking like a bum. In God's name," he exclaimed angrily, "when did you get that hair cut last? What do you think you are: the Wild Man from Borneo?"

"I don't like barbers!" Eugene burst out furiously. "That's why! I don't want them to go sticking their damned dirty fingers in my mouth. Whose business is it, if I never get my hair cut?"

"A man is judged by his appearance to-day," said Ben sententiously. "I was reading an article by a big business man in *The Post* the other day. He says he always looks at a man's shoes before he gives him a job."

He spoke seriously, haltingly, in the same way that he read, without genuine conviction. Eugene writhed to hear his fierce condor prattle this stale hash of the canny millionaires, like any obedient parrot in a teller's cage. Ben's voice had a dull flat quality as he uttered these admirable opinions: he seemed to grope behind it all for some answer, with hurt puzzled eyes. As he faltered along, with scowling intensity, through a success-sermon, there was something poignantly moving in his effort: it was the effort of his strange and lonely spirit to find some entrance into life —to find success, position, companionship. And it was as if, spelling the words out with his mouth, a settler in the Bronx from the fat Lombard plain, should try to unriddle the new world by deciphering the World Almanac, or as if some woodsman, trapped by the winter, and wasted by an obscure and terrible disease, should hunt its symptoms and its cure in a book of Household Remedies.

"Did the Old Man send you enough money to get along on?" Ben asked. "Were you able to hold your own with the other boys? He can afford it, you know. Don't let him stint you. Make him give it to you, 'Gene."

"I had plenty," said Eugene, "all that I needed."

"This is the time you need it—not later," said Ben. "Make him put you through college. This is an age of specialization. They're looking for college-trained men."

"Yes," said Eugene. He spoke obediently, indifferently, the hard bright mail of his mind undinted by the jargon: within, the Other One, who had no speech, saw.

"So get your education," said Ben, scowling vaguely. "All the Big Men—Ford, Edison, Rockefeller—whether they had it or not, say it's a good thing."

"Why didn't you go yourself?" said Eugene curiously.

"I didn't have any one to tell me," said Ben. "Besides, you don't think the Old Man would give me anything, do you?" He laughed cynically. "It's too late now."

He was silent a moment; he smoked.

"You didn't know I was taking a course in advertising, did you?" he asked, grinning.

"No. Where?"

"Through the Correspondence School," said Ben. "I get my lessons every week. I don't know," he laughed diffidently, "I must be good at it. I make the highest grades they have—98 or 100 every time. I get a diploma, if I finish the course."

A blinding mist swam across the younger brother's eyes. He did not know why. A convulsive knot gathered in his throat. He bent his head quickly and fumbled for his cigarettes. In a moment he said:

"I'm glad you're doing it. I hope you finish, Ben."

"You know," Ben said seriously, "they've turned out some Big Men. I'll show you the testimonials some time. Men who started with nothing: now they're holding down big jobs."

"I hope you do," said Eugene.

"So, you see you're not the only College Man around here," said Ben with a grin. In a moment, he went on gravely: "You're the last hope, 'Gene. Go on and finish up, if you have to steal the money. The rest of us will never amount to a damn. Try to make something out of yourself. Hold your head up! You're as good as any of them—a damn sight better than these little pimps about town." He became very fierce; he was very excited. He got up suddenly from the table. "Don't let them laugh at you! By God, we're as good as they are. If any of them laughs at you again, pick up the first damn thing you get your hand on and knock him down. Do you hear?" In his fierce excitement he snatched up the heavy carving steel from the table and brandished it.

"Yes," said Eugene awkwardly. "I think it's going to be all right now. I didn't know how to do at first."

"I hope you have sense enough now to leave those old hookers alone?" said Ben very sternly. Eugene made no answer. "You can't do that and be anything, you know. And you're likely to catch everything. This looks like a nice girl," he said quietly, after a pause. "For heaven's sake, fix yourself up and try to keep fairly clean. Women notice that, you know. Look after your fingernails, and keep your clothes pressed. Have you any money?"

"All I need," said Eugene, looking nervously toward the kitchen. "Don't, for God's sake!"

"Put it in your pocket, you little fool," Ben said angrily, thrusting a bill into his hand. "You've got to have some money. Keep it until you need it."

Helen came out on the high front porch with them as they departed. As usual, she had added a double heaping measure to what they needed. There was another shoe-box stuffed with sandwiches, boiled eggs, and fudge.

She stood on the high step-edge, with a cloth wound over her head, her gaunt arms, pitted with old scars, akimbo. A warm sunny odor of nasturtiums, loamy earth, and honeysuckle washed round them its hot spermy waves.

"O-ho! A-ha!" she winked comically. "I know something! I'm not as blind as you think, you know—" She nodded with significant jocularity, her big smiling face drenched in the curious radiance and purity that occasionally dwelt so beautifully there. He thought always, when he saw her thus, of a sky washed after rain, of wide crystalline distances, cool and clean.

With a rough snigger she prodded him in the ribs:

"Ain't love grand! Ha-ha-ha-ha! Look at his face, Laura." She drew the girl close to her in a generous hug, laughing, Oh, with laughing pity, and as they mounted the hill, she stood there, in the sunlight, her mouth slightly open, smiling, touched with radiance, beauty, and wonder.

They mounted slowly toward the eastern edge of town, by the long upward sweep of Academy Street, which bordered the negro settlement sprawled below it. At the end of Academy Street, the hill loomed abruptly; a sinuous road, well paved, curved up along the hillside to the right. They turned into this road, mounting now along the eastern edge of Niggertown. The settlement fell sharply away below them, rushing down along a series of long clay streets. There were a few frame houses by the roadside: the dwellings of negroes and poor white people, but these became sparser as they mounted. They walked at a leisurely pace up the cool road speckled with little dancing patches of light that filtered through the arching trees and shaded on the left by the dense massed foliage of the hill. Out of this green loveliness loomed the huge raw turret of a cement reservoir: it was streaked and blotted coolly with water-marks. Eugene felt thirsty. Further along, the escape from a smaller reservoir roared from a pipe in a foaming hawser, as thick as a man's body.

They climbed sharply up, along a rocky trail, avoiding the last long corkscrew of the road, and stood in the gap, at the road's summit. They were only a few hundred feet above the town: it lay before them with the sharp nearness of a Sienese picture, at once close and far. On the highest ground, he saw the solid masonry of the Square, blocked cleanly out in light and shadow, and a crawling toy that was a car, and men no bigger than sparrows. And about the Square was the treeless brick jungle of business—cheap, ragged, and ugly, and beyond all this, in indefinite patches, the houses where all the people lived, with little bright raw ulcers of suburbia further off, and the healing and concealing grace of fair massed trees. And below him, weltering up from the hollow along the flanks and shoulders of the hill, was Niggertown. There seemed to be a kind of centre at the Square, where all the cars crawled in and waited, yet there was no purpose anywhere.

But the hills were lordly, with a plan. Westward, they widened into the sun, soaring up from buttressing shoulders. The town was thrown up on the plateau like an encampment: there was nothing below him that could resist time. There was no idea. Below him, in a cup, he felt that all life was held: he saw it as might one of the old schoolmen writing in monkish Latin a Theatre of Human Life; or like Peter Breughel, in one of his swarming pictures. It seemed to him suddenly that he had not come up on the hill from the town, but that he had come out of the wilderness like a beast, and was staring now with steady beast-eye at this little huddle of wood and mortar which the wilderness must one day repossess, devour, cover over.

The seventh from the top was Troy—but Helen had lived there; and so the German dug it up.

They turned from the railing, with recovered wind, and walked through the gap, under Philip Roseberry's great arched bridge. To the left, on the summit, the rich Jew had his castle, his stables, his horses, his cows, and his daughters. As they went under the shadow of the bridge Eugene lifted his head and shouted. His voice bounded against the arch like a stone. They passed under and stood on the other side of the gap, looking from the road's edge down into the cove. But they could not yet see the cove, save for green glimmers. The hillside was thickly wooded, the road wound down its side in a white perpetual corkscrew. But they could look across at the fair wild hills on the other side of the cove, cleared half-way up their flanks with ample field and fenced meadow, and forested above with a billowing sea of greenery.

The day was like gold and sapphires: there was a swift flash and sparkle, intangible and multifarious, like sunlight on roughened water, all over the land. A rich warm wind was blowing, turning all the leaves back the same way, and making mellow music through all the lute-strings of flower and grass and fruit. The wind moaned, not with the mad fiend-voice of winter in harsh boughs, but like a fruitful woman, deep-breasted, great, full of love and wisdom; like Demeter unseen and hunting through the world. A dog bayed faintly in the cove, his howl spent and broken by the wind. A cowbell tinkled gustily. In the thick wood below them the rich notes of birds fell from their throats, straight down, like nuggets. A woodpecker drummed on the dry unbarked bole of a blasted chestnut-tree. The blue gulf of the sky was spread with light massy clouds: they cruised like swift galleons, tacking across the hills before the wind, and darkening the trees below with their floating shadows.

The boy grew blind with love and desire: the cup of his heart was glutted with all this wonder. It overcame and weakened him. He grasped the girl's cool fingers. They stood leg to leg, riven into each other's flesh. Then they left the road, cutting down across its loops along steep wooded paths. The wood was a vast green church; the bird-cries fell like plums. A great butterfly, with wings of blue velvet streaked with gold and scarlet markings, fluttered heavily before them in freckled sunlight, tottering to rest finally upon a spray of dogwood. There were light skimming noises in the dense undergrowth to either side, the swift bullet-shadows of birds. A garter snake, greener than wet moss. as long as a shoelace and no thicker than a woman's little finger, shot across the path, its tiny eyes bright with terror, its small forked tongue playing from its mouth like an electric spark. Laura cried out, drawing back in sharp terror; at her cry he snatched up a stone in a wild lust to kill the tiny creature that shot at them, through its coils, the old snake-fear, touching them with beauty, with horror, with something supernatural. But the snake glided away into the undergrowth and, with a feeling of strong shame, he threw the stone away. "They won't hurt you," he said.

At length, they came out above the cove, at a forking of the road. They turned left, to the north, toward the upper and smaller end. To the south, the cove widened out in a rich little Eden of farm and pasture. Small houses dotted the land, there were green meadows and a glint of water. Fields of young green wheat bent rhythmically under the wind; the young corn stood waist-high, with light clashing blades. The chimneys of Rheinhart's house showed above its obscuring grove of maples; the fat dairy cows grazed slowly across the wide pastures. And further below, half tree-and-shrub-hidden, lay the rich acres of Judge Webster Tayloe. The road was thickly coated with white dust; it dipped down and ran through a little brook. They crossed over on white rocks, strewn across its bed. Several ducks, scarcely disturbed by their crossing, waddled up out of the clear water and regarded them gravely, like little children in white choir aprons. A young country fellow clattered by them in a buggy filled with empty milk-cans. He grinned with a cordial red face, saluting them with a slow gesture, and leaving behind an odor of milk and sweat and butter. A woman, in a field above them, stared curiously with shaded eyes. In another field, a man was mowing with a scythe, moving into the grass like a god upon his enemies, with a reaping hook of light.

They left the road near the head of the cove, advancing over the fields on rising ground to the wooded cup of the hills. There was a powerful masculine stench of broad dock-leaves, a hot weedy odor. They moved over a pathless field, knee-high in a dry stubbly waste, gathering on their clothes clusters of brown cockle-burrs. All the field was sown with hot odorous daisies. Then they entered the wood again, mounting until they came to an island of tender grass, by a little brook that fell down from the green hill along a rocky ferny bed in bright cascades.

"Let's stop here," said Eugene. The grass was thick with dandelions: their poignant and wordless odor studded the earth with yellow magic. They were like gnomes and elves, and tiny witchcraft in flower and acorn.

Laura and Eugene lay upon their backs, looking up through the high green shimmer of leaves at the Caribbean sky, with all its fleet of cloudy ships. The water of the brook made a noise like silence. The town behind the hill lay in another unthinkable world. They forgot its pain and conflict.

"What time is it?" Eugene asked. For, they had come to a place where no time was. Laura held up her exquisite wrist, and looked at her watch.

"Why!" she exclaimed, surprised. "It's only half-past twelve!"

But he scarcely heard her.

"What do I care what time it is!" he said huskily, and he seized the lovely hand, bound with its silken watch-cord, and kissed it. Her long cool fingers closed around his own; she drew his face down to her mouth.

They lay there, locked together, upon that magic carpet, in that paradise. Her gray eyes were deeper and clearer than a pool of clear water; he kissed the little freckles on her rare skin; he gazed reverently at the snub tilt of her nose; he watched the mirrored dance of the sparkling water over her face. All of that magic world—flower and field and sky and hill, and all the sweet woodland cries, sound and sight and odor—grew into him, one voice in his heart, one tongue in his brain, harmonious, radiant, and whole—a single passionate lyrical noise.

"My dear! Darling! Do you remember last night?" he asked fondly, as if recalling some event of her childhood.

"Yes," she gathered her arms tightly about his neck, "why do you think I could forget it?"

"Do you remember what I said—what I asked you to do?" he insisted eagerly.

"Oh, what are we going to do? What are we going to do?" she moaned, turning her head to the side and flinging an arm across her eyes.

"What is it? What's the matter? Dear!"

"Eugene—my dear, you're only a child. I'm so old—a grown woman."

"You're only twenty-one," he said. "There's only five years' difference. That's nothing."

"Oh!" she said. "You don't know what you're saying. It's all the difference in the world."

"When I'm twenty, you'll be twenty-five. When I'm twenty-six, you'll be thirty-one. When I'm forty-eight, you'll be fifty-three. What's that?" he said contemptuously. "Nothing."

"Everything," she said, "everything. If I were sixteen, and you twenty-one it would be nothing. But you're a boy and I'm a woman. When you're a young man I'll be an old maid; when you grow old I shall be dying. How do you know where you'll be, what you'll be doing five years from now?" she continued in a moment. "You're only a boy—you've just started college. You have no plans yet. You don't know what you're going to do."

"Yes, I do!" he yelled furiously. "I'm going to be a lawyer. That's what they're sending me for. I'm going to be a lawyer, and I'm going into politics. Perhaps," he added with gloomy pleasure, "you'll be sorry then, after I make a name for myself." With bitter joy he foresaw his lonely celebrity. The Governor's Mansion. Forty rooms. Alone. Alone.

"You're going to be a lawyer," said Laura, "and you're going everywhere in the world, and I'm to wait for you, and never get married. You poor kid!" She laughed softly. "You don't know what you're going to do."

He turned a face of misery on her; brightness dropped from the sun.

"You don't care?" he choked. "You don't care?" He bent his head to hide his wet eyes.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "I do care. But people don't live like that. It's like a story. Don't you know that I'm a grown woman? At my age, dear, most girls have begun to think of getting married. What—what if I had begun to think of it, too?"

"Married!" The word came from him in a huge gasp of horror as if she had mentioned the abominable, proposed the unspeakable. Then, having heard the monstrous suggestion, he immediately accepted it as a fact. He was like that.

"So! That's it!" he said furiously. "You're going to get married, eh? You have fellows, have you? You go out with them, do you? You've known it all the time, and you've tried to fool me."

Nakedly, with breast bare to horror, he scourged himself, knowing in the moment that the nightmare cruelty of life is not in the remote and fantastic, but in the probable—the horror of love, loss, marriage, the ninety seconds treason in the dark.

"You have fellows—you let them feel you. They feel your legs, they play with your breasts, they—" His voice became inaudible through strangulation.

"No. No, my dear. I haven't said so," she rose swiftly to a sitting position, taking his hands. "But there's nothing unusual about getting married, you know. Most people do. Oh, my dear! Don't look like that! Nothing has happened. Nothing! Nothing!"

He seized her fiercely, unable to speak. Then he buried his face in her neck.

"Laura! My dear! My sweet! Don't leave me alone! I've been alone! I've always been alone!"

"It's what you want, dear. It's what you'll always want. You couldn't stand anything else. You'd get so tired of me. You'll forget this ever happened. You'll forget me. You'll forget—forget."

"Forget! I'll never forget! I won't live long enough."

"And I'll never love any one else! I'll never leave you! I'll wait for you forever! Oh, my child, my child!"

They clung together in that bright moment of wonder, there on the magic island, where the world was quiet, believing all they said. And who shall say—whatever disenchantment follows—that we ever forget magic, or that we can ever betray, on this leaden earth, the apple-tree, the singing, and the gold? Far out beyond that timeless valley, a train, on the rails for the East, wailed back its ghostly cry: life, like a fume of painted smoke, a broken wrack of cloud, drifted away. Their world was a singing voice again: they were young and they could never die. This would endure.

He kissed her on her splendid eyes; he grew into her young Mænad's body, his heart numbed deliciously against the pressure of her narrow breasts. She was as lithe and yielding to his sustaining hand as a willow rod—she was bird-swift, more elusive in repose than the dancing water-motes upon her face. He held her tightly lest she grow into the tree again, or be gone amid the wood like smoke.

Come up into the hills, O my young love. Return! O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again, as first I knew you in the timeless valley, where we shall feel ourselves anew, bedded on magic in the month of June. There was a place where all the sun went glistering in your hair, and from the hill we could have put a finger on a star. Where is the day that melted into one rich noise? Where the music of your flesh, the rhyme of your teeth, the dainty languor of your legs, your small firm arms, your slender fingers, to be bitten like an apple, and the little cherry-teats of your white breasts? And where are all the tiny wires of finespun maidenhair? Quick are the mouths of earth, and quick the teeth that fed upon this loveliness. You who were made for music, will hear music no more: in your dark house the winds are silent. Ghost, ghost, come back from that marriage that we did not foresee, return not into life, but into magic, where we have never died, into the enchanted wood, where we still lie, strewn on the grass. Come up into the hills, O my young love: return. O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.

XXXI

One day, when June was coming to its end, Laura James said to him:

"I shall have to go home next week." Then, seeing his stricken face, she added, "but only for a few days—not more than a week."

"But why? The summer's only started. You will burn up down there."

"Yes. It's silly, I know. But my people expect me for the Fourth of July. You know, we have an enormous family—hundreds of aunts, cousins, and in-laws. We have a family re-union every year—a great barbecue and picnic. I hate it. But they'd never forgive me if I didn't come."

Frightened, he looked at her for a moment.

"Laura! You're coming back, aren't you?" he said quietly.

"Yes, of course," she said. "Be quiet."

He was trembling violently; he was afraid to question her more closely.

"Be quiet," she whispered, "quiet!" She put her arms around him.

He went with her to the station on a hot mid-afternoon. There was a smell of melted tar in the streets. She held his hand beside her in the rattling trolley. squeezing his fingers to give him comfort, and whispering from time to time:

"In a week! Only a week, dear."

"I don't see the need," he muttered. "It's over 400 miles. Just for a few days."

He passed the old one-legged gateman on the station platform very easily, carrying her baggage. Then he sat beside her in the close green heat of the pullman until the train should go. A little electric fan droned uselessly above the aisle; a prim young lady whom he knew, arranged herself amid the bright new leather of her bags. She returned his greeting elegantly, with a shade of refined hauteur, then looked out the window again, grimacing eloquently at her parents who gazed at her raptly from the platform. Several prosperous merchants went down the aisle in expensive tan shoes that creaked under the fan's drone.

"Not going to leave us, are you, Mr. Morris?"

"Hello, Jim. No, I'm running up to Richmond for a few days." But even the gray weather of their lives could not deaden the excitement of that hot chariot to the East.

"'Board!"

He got up trembling.

"In a few days, dear." She looked up, taking his hand in her small gloved palms.

"You will write as soon as you get there? Please!"

"Yes. To-morrow—at once."

He bent down suddenly and whispered, "Laura—you will come back. You will come back!"

She turned her face away and wept bitterly. He sat beside her once more; she clasped him tightly as if he had been a child.

"My dear, my dear! Don't forget me ever!"

"Never. Come back. Come back."

The salt print of her kiss was on his mouth, his face, his eyes. It was, he knew, the guttering candle-end of time. The train was in motion. He leaped blindly up the passage with a cry in his throat.

"Come back again!"

But he knew. Her cry followed him, as if he had torn something from her grasp.

Within three days he had his letter. On four sheets of paper, bordered with victorious little American flags, this:

"My dear: I got home at half-past one, just too tired to move. I couldn't sleep on the train at all last night, it seemed to get hotter all the way down. I was so blue when I got here, I almost cried. Little Richmond is too ghastly for words—everything burned up and every one gone away to the mountains or the sea. How can I ever stand it even for a week!" (Good! he thought. If the weather holds, she will come back all the sooner.) "It would be heaven now to get one breath of mountain air. Could you find your way back to our place in the valley again?" (Yes, even if I were blind, he thought.) "Will you promise to look after your hand until it gets well? I worried so after you had gone, because I forgot to change the bandage yesterday. Daddy was glad to see me: he said he was not going to let me go again but, don't worry, I'll have my own way in the end. I always do. I don't know any one at home any more—all of the boys have enlisted or gone to work in the shipyards at Norfolk. Most of the girls I know are getting married, or married already. That leaves only the kids." (He winced. As old as I am, maybe older.) "Give my love to Mrs. Barton, and tell your mother I said she must not work so hard in that hot kitchen. And all the little cross-marks at the bottom are for you. Try to guess what they are.

LAURA."

He read her prosy letter with rigid face, devouring the words more hungrily than if they had been lyrical song. She would come back! She would come back! Soon.

There was another page. Weakened and relaxed from his excitement, he looked at it. There he found, almost illegibly written, but at last in her own speech, as if leaping out from the careful aimlessness of her letter, this note:

"July 4.

"Richard came yesterday. He is twenty-five, works in Norfolk. I've been engaged to him almost a year. We're going off quietly to Norfolk to-morrow and get married. My dear! My dear! I couldn't tell you! I tried to, but couldn't. I didn't want to lie. Everything else was true. I meant all I said. If you hadn't been so young, but what's the use of saying that? Try to forgive me, but please don't forget me. Good-by and God bless you. Oh, my darling, it was heaven! I shall never forget you."

When he had finished the letter, he re-read it, slowly and carefully. Then he folded it, put it in his inner breast-pocket, and leaving Dixieland, walked for forty minutes, until he came up in the gap over the town again. It was sunset. The sun's vast rim, blood-red, rested upon the western earth, in a great field of murky pollen. It sank beyond the western ranges. The clear sweet air was washed with gold and pearl. The vast hills melted into purple solitudes: they were like Canaan and rich grapes. The motors of cove people toiled up around the horse-shoe of the road. Dusk came. The bright winking lights in the town went up. Darkness melted over the town like dew: it washed out all the day's distress, the harsh confusions. Low wailing sounds came faintly up from Niggertown.

And above him the proud stars flashed into heaven: there was one, so rich and low, that he could have picked it, if he had climbed the hill beyond the Jew's great house. One, like a lamp, hung low above the heads of men returning home. (O Hesperus, you bring us all good things). One had flashed out the light that winked on him the night that Ruth lay at the feet of Boaz; and one on Queen Isolt; and one on Corinth and on Troy. It was night, vast brooding night, the mother of loneliness, that washes our stains away. He was washed in the great river of night, in the Ganges tides of redemption. His bitter wound was for the moment healed in him: he turned his face upward to the proud and tender stars, which made him a god and a grain of dust, the brother of eternal beauty and the son of death—alone, alone.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" Helen laughed huskily, prodding him in the ribs. "Your girl went and got married, didn't she? She fooled you. You got left."

"Wh-a-a-a-t!" said Eliza banteringly, "has my boy been—as the fellow says" (she sniggered behind her hand) "has my boy been a-courtin'?" She puckered her lips in playful reproach.

"Oh, for God's sake," he muttered angrily. "What fellow says!"

His scowl broke into an angry grin as he caught his sister's eye. They laughed.

"Well, 'Gene," said the girl seriously, "forget about it. You're only a kid yet. Laura is a grown woman."

"Why, son," said Eliza with a touch of malice, "that girl was fooling you all the time. She was just leading you on."

"Oh, stop it, please."

"Cheer up!" said Helen heartily. "Your time's coming. You'll forget her in a week. There are plenty more, you know. This is puppy love. Show her that you're a good sport. You ought to write her a letter of congratulation."

"Why, yes," said Eliza, "I'd make a big joke of it all. I wouldn't let on to her that it affected me. I'd write her just as big as you please and laugh about the whole thing. I'd show them! That's what I'd——"

"Oh, for God's sake!" he groaned, starting up. "Leave me alone, won't you?"

He left the house.

But he wrote the letter. And the moment after the lid of the mail-box clanged over it, he was writhen by shame. For it was a proud and boastful letter, salted with scatterings of Greek, Latin, and English verse, quotable scraps, wrenched into the text without propriety, without accuracy, without anything but his pitiful and obvious desire to show her his weight in the point of his wit, the depth of his learning. She would be sorry when she knew her loss! But, for a moment at the end, his fiercely beating heart stormed through:

". . . and I hope he's worth having you—he can't deserve you, Laura; no one can. But if he knows what he has, that's something. How lucky he is! You're right about me—I'm too young. I'd cut off my hand now for eight or ten years more. God bless and keep you, my dear, dear Laura.

"Something in me wants to burst. It keeps trying to, but it won't, it never has. O God! If it only would! I shall never forget you. I'm lost now and I'll never find the way again. In God's name write me a line when you get this. Tell me what your name is now—you never have. Tell me where you're going to live. Don't let me go entirely, I beg of you, don't leave me alone."

He sent the letter to the address she had given him—to her father's house. Week melted into week: his life mounted day by day in a terrible tension to the delivery of the mail, morning and afternoon, fell then into a miasmic swamp when no word came. July ended. The summer waned. She did not write.

Upon the darkening porch, awaiting food, the boarders rocked, oh rocked with laughter.

The boarders said: "Eugene's lost his girl. He doesn't know what to do, he's lost his girl."

"Well, well! Did the Old Boy lose his girl?"

The little fat girl, the daughter of one of the two fat sisters whose husbands were hotel clerks in Charleston, skipped to and from him, in slow May dance, with fat calves twinkling brownly above her socks.

"Lost his girl! Lost his girl! Eugene, Eugene, has lost his girl."

The fat little girl skipped back to her fat mother for approbation: they regarded each other with complacent smiles loosely netted in their full-meated mouths.

"Don't let them kid you, big boy. What's the matter: did some one get your girl?" asked Mr. Hake, the flour salesman. He was a dapper young man of twenty-six years, who smoked large cigars; he had a tapering face, and a high domey head, bald on top, fringed sparsely with fine blond hair. His mother, a large grass-widow near fifty, with the powerful craggy face of an Indian, a large mass of dyed yellow hair, and a coarse smile, full of gold and heartiness, rocked mightily, laughing with hoarse compassion:

"Git another girl, 'Gene. Why, law! I'd not let it bother me two minutes." He always expected her to spit, emphatically, with gusto, after speaking.

"You should worry, boy. You should *worry!*" said Mr. Farrel, of Miami, the dancing instructor. "Women are like street-cars: if you miss one, there's another along in fifteen minutes. Ain't that right, lady?" he said pertly, turning to Miss Clark, of Valdosta, Georgia, for whom it had been uttered. She answered with a throaty confused twiddle-giggle of laughter. "Oh, aren't men the awfullest——"

Leaning upon the porch rail in the thickening dusk, Mr.

Jake Clapp, a well-to-do widower from Old Hominy, pursued his stealthy courtship of Miss Florry Mangle, the trained nurse. Her limp face made a white blot in the darkness; she spoke in a tired whine:

"I thought she was too old for him when I saw her. 'Gene's only a kid. He's taken it hard, you can tell by looking at him how miserable he is. He's going to get sick if he keeps on at this rate. He's thin as a bone. He hardly eats a bite. People get run down like that and catch the first disease that comes along——"

Her melancholy whine continued as Jake's stealthy thigh fumbled against her. She kept her arms carefully folded across her sagging breasts.

In the gray darkness, the boy turned his starved face on them. His dirty clothes lapped round his scarecrow body: his eyes burned like a cat's in the dark, his hair fell over his forehead in a matted net.

"He'll git over it," said Jake Clapp, in a precise country drawl, streaked with a note of bawdry. "Every boy has got to go through the Calf-Love stage. When I was about 'Gene's age—" He pressed his hard thigh gently against Florry, grinning widely and thinly with a few gold teeth. He was a tall solid man, with a hard precise face, lewdly decorous, and slanting Mongol eyes. His head was bald and knobby.

"He'd better watch out," whined Florry sadly. "I know what I'm talking about. That boy's not strong—he has no business to go prowling around to all hours the way he does. He's on the verge of——"

Eugene rocked gently on his feet, staring at the boarders with a steady hate. Suddenly he snarled like a wild beast, and started down the porch, unable to speak, reeling, but snarling again and again his choking and insane fury.

"Miss Brown" meanwhile sat primly at the end of the porch, a little apart from the others. From the dark sun-parlor at the side came swiftly the tall elegant figure of Miss Irene Mallard, twenty-eight, of Tampa, Florida. She caught him at the step edge, and pulled him round sharply, gripping his arms lightly with her cool long fingers.

"Where are you going, 'Gene?" she said quietly. Her eyes of light violet were a little tired. There was a faint exquisite perfume of rosewater.

"Leave me alone!" he muttered.

"You can't go on like this," she said in a low tone. "She's not worth it—none of them are. Pull yourself together."

"Leave me alone!" he said furiously. "I know what I'm doing!" He wrenched away violently, and leaped down into the yard, plunging around the house in a staggering run.

"Ben!" said Irene Mallard sharply.

Ben rose from the dark porch-swing where he had been sitting with Mrs. Pert.

"See if you can't do something to stop him," said Irene Mallard.

"He's crazy," Ben muttered. "Which way did he go?"

"By there—around the house. Go quick!"

Ben went swiftly down the shallow steps and loped back over the lawn. The yard sloped sharply down: the gaunt back of Dixieland was propped upon a dozen rotting columns of whitewashed brick, fourteen feet high. In the dim light, by one of these slender piers, already mined with crumbling ruins of wet brick, the scarecrow crouched, toiling with the thin grapevine of his arms against the temple.

"I will kill you, House," he gasped. "Vile and accursed House, I will tear you down. I will bring you down upon the whores and boarders. I will wreck you, House."

Another convulsion of his shoulders brought down a sprinkling rain of dust and rubble.

"I will make you fall down on all the people in you, House," he said.

"Fool!" cried Ben, leaping upon him, "what are you trying to do?" He caught the boy's arms from behind and dragged him back. "Do you think you can bring her back to you by wrecking the house? Are there no other women in the world, that you should let one get the best of you like this?"

"Let me go! Let me go!" said Eugene. "What does it matter to you?"

"Don't think, fool, that I care," said Ben fiercely. "You're hurting no one but yourself. Do you think you'll hurt the boarders by pulling the house down on your own head? Do you think, idiot, that any one cares if you kill yourself?" He shook the boy. "No. No. I don't care what you do, you know. I simply want to save the family the trouble and expense of burying you."

With a great cry of rage and bafflement Eugene tried to free himself. But the older brother held on as desperately as the Old Man of the Sea. Then, with a great effort of his hands and shoulders, the boy lifted his captor off the ground, and dashed him back against the white brick wall of the cellar. Ben collapsed, releasing him, with a fit of dry coughing, holding his hand against his thin breast.

"Don't be a fool," he gasped.

"Did I hurt you?" said Eugene dully.

"No. Go into the house and wash yourself. You ought to comb your hair once or twice a week, you know. You can't go around like a wild man. Get something to eat. Have you any money?"

"Yes—I have enough."

"Are you all right now?"

"Yes—don't talk about it, please."

"I don't want to talk about it, fool. I want you to learn a little sense," said Ben. He straightened, brushing his whitened coat. In a moment, he went on quietly: "To hell with them, 'Gene. To hell with them all. Don't let them worry you. Get all that you can. Don't give a damn for anything. Nothing gives a damn for you. To hell with it all! To hell with it! There are a lot of bad days. There are a lot of good ones. You'll forget. There are a lot of days. Let it go."

"Yes," said Eugene wearily, "let it go. It's all right now. I'm too tired. When you get tired you don't care, do you? I'm too tired to care. I'll never care any more. I'm too tired. The men in France get tired and don't care. If a man came and pointed a gun at me now, I wouldn't be scared. I'm too tired." He began to laugh, loosely, with a sense of delicious relief. "I don't care for any one or anything. I've always been afraid of everything, but when I got tired I didn't care. That's how I shall get over everything. I shall get tired."

Ben lighted a cigarette.

"That's better," he said. "Let's get something to eat." He smiled thinly. "Come along, Samson."

They walked out slowly around the house.

He washed himself, and ate a hearty meal. The boarders finished, and wandered off into the darkness variously—some to the band-concert on the Square, some to the moving-pictures, some for walks through the town. When he had fed he went out on the porch. It was dark and almost empty save where, at the side, Mrs. Selborne sat in the swing with a wealthy lumber man from Tennessee. Her low rich laughter bubbled up softly from the vat of the dark. "Miss Brown" rocked quietly and decorously by herself. She was a heavily built and quietly dressed woman of thirty-nine years, touched with that slightly comic primness—that careful gentility—that marks the conduct of the prostitute incognito. She was being very refined. She was a perfect lady and would, if aroused, assert the fact.

"Miss Brown" lived, she said, in Indianapolis. She was not ugly: her face was simply permeated with the implacable dulness of the Mid-Westerner. In spite of the lewdness of her wide thin mouth, her look was smug. She had a fair mass of indifferent brown hair, rather small brown eyes, and a smooth russet skin.

"Pshaw!" said Eliza. "I don't believe her name's 'Miss Brown' any more than mine is."

There had been rain. The night was cool and black; the flower-bed before the house was wet, with a smell of geraniums and drenched pansies. He lighted a cigarette, sitting upon the rail. "Miss Brown" rocked.

"It's turned off cool," she said. "That little bit of rain has done a lot of good, hasn't it?"

"Yes, it was hot," he said. "I hate hot weather."

"I can't stand it either," she said. "That's why I go away every summer. Out my way we catch it. You folks here don't know what hot weather is."

"You're from Milwaukee, aren't you?"

"Indianapolis."

"I knew it was somewhere out there. Is it a big place?" he asked curiously.

"Yes. You could put Altamont in one corner of it and never miss it."

"How big is it?" he said eagerly. "How many people have you there?"

"I don't know exactly—over three hundred thousand with the suburbs."

He reflected with greedy satisfaction.

"Is it pretty? Are there a lot of pretty houses and fine buildings?"

"Yes—I think so," she said reflectively. "It's a nice homelike place."

"What are the people like? What do they do? Are they rich?"

"Why—yes. It's a business and manufacturing place. There are a lot of rich people."

"I suppose they live in big houses and ride around in big cars, eh?" he demanded. Then, without waiting for a reply, he went on: "Do they have good things to eat? What?"

She laughed awkwardly, puzzled and confused.

"Why, yes. There's a great deal of German cooking. Do you like German cooking?"

"Beer!" he muttered lusciously. "Beer—eh? You make it out there?"

"Yes." She laughed, with a voluptuous note in her voice. "I believe you're a bad boy, Eugene."

"And what about the theatres and libraries? You have lots of shows, don't you?"

"Yes. A lot of good shows come to Indianapolis. All the big hits in New York and Chicago."

"And a library—you have a big one, eh?"

"Yes. We have a nice library."

"How many books has it?"

"Oh, I can't say as to that. But it's a good big library."

"Over 100,000 books, do you suppose? They wouldn't have half a million, would they?" He did not wait for an answer, he was talking to himself. "No, of course not. How many books can you take out at a time? What?"

The great shadow of his hunger bent over her; he rushed out of himself, devouring her with his questions.

"What are the girls like? Are they blonde or brunette? What?"

"Why, we have both kinds—more dark than fair, I should say." She looked through the darkness at him, grinning.

"Are they pretty?"

"Well! I can't say. You'll have to draw your own conclusions, Eugene. I'm one of them, you know." She looked at him with demure lewdness, offering herself for inspection. Then, with a laugh of teasing reproof, she said: "I believe you're a bad boy, Eugene. I believe you're a bad boy."

He lighted another cigarette feverishly.

"I'd give anything for a smoke," muttered "Miss Brown." "I don't suppose I could here?" She looked round her.

"Why not?" he said impatiently. "There's no one to see you. It's dark. What does it matter anyway?"

Little electric currents of excitement played up his spine.

"I believe I will," she whispered. "Have you got a cigarette?"

He gave her his package; she stood up to receive the flame he nursed in his cupped hands. She leaned her heavy body against him as, with puckered face and closed eyes, she held her cigarette to the fire. She grasped his shaking hands to steady the light, holding them for a moment after.

"What," said "Miss Brown," with a cunning smile, "what if your mother should see us? You'd catch it!"

"She'll not see us," he said. "Besides," he added generously, "why shouldn't women smoke the same as men? There's no harm in it."

"Yes," said "Miss Brown," "I believe in being broad-minded about these things, too."

But he grinned in the dark, because the woman had revealed herself with a cigarette. It was a sign—the sign of the province, the sign unmistakable of debauchery.

Then, when he laid his hands upon her, she came very passively into his embrace as he sat before her on the rail.

"Eugene! Eugene!" she said in mocking reproof.

"Where is your room?" he said.

She told him.

Later, Eliza came suddenly and silently out upon them, on one of her swift raids from the kitchen.

"Who's there? Who's there?" she said, peering into the gloom suspiciously. "Huh? Hah? Where's Eugene? Has any one seen Eugene?" She knew very well he was there.

"Yes, here I am," he said. "What do you want?"

"Oh! Who's that with you? Hah?"

"'Miss Brown' is with me."

"Won't you come out and sit down, Mrs. Gant?" said "Miss Brown." "You must be tired and hot."

"Oh!" said Eliza awkwardly, "is that you, 'Miss Brown'? I couldn't see who it was." She switched on the dim porch light. "It's mighty dark out here. Some one coming up those steps might fall and break a leg. I tell you what," she continued conversationally, "this air feels good. I wish I could let everything go and just enjoy myself."

She continued in amiable monologue for another half hour, her eyes probing about swiftly all the time at the two dark figures before her. Then hesitantly, by awkward talkative stages, she went into the house again.

"Son," she said before she went, troubled, "it's getting late. You'd better go to bed. That's where we all ought to be."

"Miss Brown" assented gracefully and moved toward the door. "I'm going now. I feel tired. Good-night, all."

He sat quietly on the rail, smoking, listening to the noises in the house. It went to sleep. He went back and found Eliza preparing to retire to her little cell.

"Son!" she said, in a low voice, after shaking her puckered face reproachfully for a moment, "I tell you what—I don't like it. It doesn't look right—your sitting out alone with that woman. She's old enough to be your mother."

"She's *your* boarder, isn't she?" he said roughly, "not mine. I didn't bring her here."

"There's one thing sure," said Eliza, wounded. "You don't catch me associating with them. I hold up my head as high as any one." She smiled at him bitterly.

"Well, good-night, mama," he said, ashamed and hurt. "Let's forget about them for a while. What does it matter?"

"Be a good boy," said Eliza timidly. "I want you to be a good boy, son."

There was a sense of guilt in her manner, a note of regret and contrition.

"Don't worry!" he said, turning away suddenly, wrenched bitterly, as he always was, by a sense of the child-like innocence and steadfastness that lay at the bottom of her life. "It's not your fault if I'm not. I shan't blame you. Good-night."

The kitchen-light went out; he heard his mother's door click gently. Through the dark house a shaft of air blew coolly. Slowly, with thudding heart, he began to mount the stairs.

But on that dark stair, his foot-falls numbed in the heavy carpet, he came squarely upon a woman's body that, by its fragrance, like magnolia, he knew was that of Mrs. Selborne. They held each other sharply by the arms, discovered, with caught breath. She bent toward him: a few strands of her blonde hair brushed his face, leaving it aflame.

"Hush-h!" she whispered.

So they paused there, holding each other, breast to breast, the only time that they had ever touched. Then, with their dark wisdom of each other confirmed, they parted, each a sharer in the other's life, to meet thereafter before the world with calm untelling eyes.

He groped softly back along the dark corridor until he came to the door of "Miss Brown's" room. It was slightly ajar. He went in.

She took all his medals, all that he had won at Leonard's school—the one for debating, the one for declaiming, the one in bronze for William Shakespeare. W. S. 1616–1916—Done for a Ducat!

He had no money to give her: she did not want much—a coin or two at a time. It was, she said, not the money: it was the principle of the thing. He saw the justice of her argument.

"For," said she, "if I wanted money, I wouldn't fool with you. Somebody tries to get me to go out every day. One of the richest men in this town (old man Tyson) has been after me ever since I came. He's offered me ten dollars if I'll go out in his car with him. I don't need your money. But you've got to give me something. I don't care how little it is. I wouldn't feel decent unless you did. I'm not one of your little Society Chippies that you see every day uptown. I've too much self-respect for that."

So, in lieu of money, he gave her his medals as pledges.

"If you don't redeem them," said "Miss Brown," "I'll give them to my own son when I go home."

"Have you a son?"

"Yes. He's eighteen years old. He's almost as tall as you are and twice as broad. All the girls are mad about him."

He turned his head away sharply, whitening with a sense of nausea and horror, feeling in him an incestuous pollution.

"That's enough, now," said "Miss Brown" with authority. "Go to your room and get some sleep."

But, unlike the first one in the tobacco town, she never called him "son."

"Poor Butterfly, for her heart was break-king,
Poor Butterfly, for she loved him so-o——"

Miss Irene Mallard changed the needle of the little phonograph in the sun-parlor, and reversed the well-worn record. Then as with stately emphasis, the opening measure of "Katinka" paced out, she waited for him, erect, smiling, slender, beautiful, with long lovely hands held up like wings to his embrace. She was teaching him to dance. Laura James had danced beautifully: it had maddened him to see her poised in the arms of a young man dancing. Now, clumsily, he moved off on a conscientious left foot, counting to himself. One, two, three, four! Irene Mallard slipped and veered to his awkward pressure, as bodiless as a fume of smoke. Her left hand rested on his bony shoulder lightly as a bird: her cool fingers were threaded into his hot sawing palm.

She had thick hair of an oaken color, evenly parted in the middle; her skin was pearl-pale, and transparently delicate; her jaw was long, full, and sensuous—her face was like that of one of the pre-Raphaelite women. She carried her tall graceful body with beautiful erectness, but with the slightly worn sensuousness of fragility and weariness: her lovely eyes were violet, always a little tired, but full of slow surprise and tenderness. She was like a Luini madonna, mixed of holiness and seduction, the world and heaven. He held her with reverent care, as one who would not come too near, who would not break a sacred image. Her exquisite and subtle perfume stole through him like a strange whisper, pagan and divine. He was afraid to touch her—and his hot palm sweated to her fingers.

Sometimes she coughed gently, smiling, holding a small crumpled handkerchief, edged with blue, before her mouth.

She had come to the hills not because of her own health, but because of her mother's, a woman of sixty-five, rustily dressed, with the petulant hang-dog face of age and sickness. The old woman suffered from asthma and heart-disease. They had come from Florida. Irene Mallard was a very capable business woman; she was the chief bookkeeper of one of the Altamont banks. Every evening Randolph Gudger, the bank president, telephoned her.

Irene Mallard pressed her palm across the mouthpiece of the telephone, smiling at Eugene ironically, and rolling her eyes entreatingly aloft.

Sometimes Randolph Gudger drove by and asked her to go with him. The boy went sulkily away until the rich man should leave: the banker looked bitterly after him.

"He wants me to marry him, 'Gene," said Irene Mallard. "What am I going to do?"

"He's old enough to be your grandfather," said Eugene. "He has no hair on the top of his head; his teeth are false, and I don't know what-all!" he said resentfully.

"He's a rich man, 'Gene," said Irene, smiling. "Don't forget that."

"Go on, then! Go on!" he cried furiously. "Yes—go ahead. Marry him. It's the right thing for you. Sell yourself. He's an old man!" he said melodramatically. Randolph Gudger was almost forty-five.

But they danced there slowly in a gray light of dusk that was like pain and beauty; like the lost light undersea, in which his life, a lost merman, swam, remembering exile. And as they danced she, whom he dared not touch, yielded her body unto him, whispering softly to his ear, pressing with slender fingers his hot hand. And she, whom he would not touch, lay there, like a sheaf of grain, in the crook of his arm, token of the world's remedy—the refuge from the one lost face out of all the faces, the anodyne against the wound named Laura—a thousand flitting shapes of beauty to bring him comfort and delight. The great pageantry of pain and pride and death hung through the dusk its awful vision, touching his sorrow with a lonely joy. He had lost; but all pilgrimage across the world was loss: a moment of cleaving, a moment of taking away, the thousand phantom shapes that beaconed, and the high impassionate grief of stars.

It was dark. Irene Mallard took him by the hand and led him out on the porch.

"Sit down here a moment, 'Gene. I want to talk to you." Her voice was serious, low-pitched. He sat beside her in the swing, obediently, with the sense of an impending lecture.

"I've been watching you these last few days," said Irene Mallard. "I know what's been going on."

"What do you mean?" he said thickly, with thudding pulses.

"You know what I mean," said Irene Mallard sternly. "Now you're too fine a boy, 'Gene, to waste yourself on that Woman. Any one can see what she is. Mother and I have both talked about it. A woman like that can ruin a young boy like you. You've got to stop it."

"How did you know about it?" he muttered. He was frightened and ashamed. She took his trembling hand and held it between her cool palms until he grew quieter. But he drew no closer to her: he halted, afraid, before her loveliness. As with Laura James, she seemed too high for his passion. He was afraid of her flesh; he was not afraid of "Miss Brown's." But now he was tired of the woman and didn't know how he could pay her. She had all his medals.

All through the waning summer he walked with Irene Mallard. They walked at night through the cool streets filled with the rustle of tired leaves. They went together to the hotel roof and danced; later "Pap" Rheinhart, kind and awkward and shy, and smelling of his horse, came to their little table, sitting and drinking with them. He had spent the years since Leonard's at a military school, trying to straighten the wry twist of his neck. But he remained the same as ever—quizzical, dry, and humorous. Eugene looked at that good shy face, remembering the lost years, the lost faces. And there was sorrow in his heart for what would come no more. August ended.

September came, full of departing wings. The world was full of departures. It had heard the drums. The young men were going to the war. Ben had been rejected again in the draft. Now he was preparing to drift off in search of employment in other towns. Luke had given up his employment in a war-munitions factory at Dayton, Ohio, and had enlisted in the Navy. He had come home on a short leave before his departure for the training-school at Newport, Rhode Island. The street roared as he came down at his vulgar wide-legged stride, in flapping blues, his face all on the grin, thick curls of his unruly hair coiling below the band of his hat. He was the cartoon of a gob.

"Luke!" shouted Mr. Fawcett, the land-auctioneer, pulling him in from the street to Wood's pharmacy, "by God, son, you've done your bit. I'm going to set you up. What are you going to have?"

"Make it a dope," said Luke. "Colonel, yours truly!" He lifted the frosty glass in a violently palsied hand, and stood posed before the grinning counter. "F-f-f-Forty years ago," he began, in a hoarse voice, "I might have refused, but now I can't, G-G-G-God help me! I c-c-c-c-can't!"

Gant's sickness had returned on him with increased virulence. His face was haggard and yellow: a tottering weakness crept into his limbs. It was decided that he must go again to Baltimore. Helen would go with him.

"Mr. Gant," said Eliza persuasively, "why don't you just give up everything and settle down to take things easy the rest of your days? You don't feel good enough to tend to business any more; if I were you, I'd retire. We could get $20,000 for your shop without any trouble— If I had that much money to work with, I'd show them a thing or two." She nodded pertly with a smart wink. "I could turn it over two or three times within two years' time. You've got to trade quick to keep the ball a-rolling. That's the way it's done."

"Merciful God!" he groaned. "That's my last refuge on earth. Woman, have you no mercy? I beg of you, leave me to die in peace: it won't be long now. You can do what you please with it after I'm gone, but give me a little peace now. In the name of Jesus, I ask it!" He sniffled affectedly.

"Pshaw!" said Eliza, thinking no doubt to encourage him. "There's nothing wrong with you. Half of it's only imagination."

He groaned, turning his head away.

Summer died upon the hills. There was a hue, barely guessed, upon the foliage, of red rust. The streets at night were filled with sad lispings: all through the night, upon his porch, as in a coma, he heard the strange noise of autumn. And all the people who had given the town its light thronging gaiety were vanished strangely overnight. They had gone back into the vast South again. The solemn tension of the war gathered about the nation. A twilight of grim effort hovered around him, above him. He felt the death of joy; but the groping within him of wonder, of glory. Out of the huge sprawl of its first delirium, the nation was beginning to articulate the engines of war—engines to mill and print out hatred and falsehood, engines to pump up glory, engines to manacle and crush opposition, engines to drill and regiment men.

But something of true wonder had come upon the land—the flares and rockets of the battle-fields cast their light across the plains as well. Young men from Kansas were going to die in Picardy. In some foreign earth lay the iron, as yet unmoulded, that was to slay them. The strangeness of death and destiny was legible upon lives and faces which held no strangeness of their own. For, it is the union of the ordinary and the miraculous that makes wonder.

Luke had gone away to the training-school at Newport. Ben went to Baltimore with Helen and Gant, who, before entering the hospital again for radium treatment, had gone on a violent and unruly spree which had compelled their rapid transference from one hotel to another and had finally brought Gant moaning to his bed, hurling against God the anathemas that should have been saved for huge riotings in raw oysters washed down chaotically with beer and whisky. They all drank a great deal: Gant's excesses, however, reduced the girl to a state of angry frenzy, and Ben to one of scowling and cursing disgust.

"You damned old man!" cried Helen, seizing and shaking his passive shoulders as he lay reeking and sodden on an untidy bed. "I could wear you out! You're not sick; I've wasted my life nursing you, and you're not as sick as I am! You'll be here long after I'm gone, you selfish old man! It makes me furious!"

"Why, baby!" he roared, with a vast gesture of his arms, "God bless you, I couldn't do without you."

"Don't 'baby' me!" she cried.

But she held his hand next day as they rode out to the hospital, held it as, quaking, he turned for an instant and looked sadly at the city stretched behind and below him.

"I was a boy here," he mutttered.

"Don't worry," she said, "we're going to make you well again. Why! You'll be a boy again!"

Hand in hand they entered the lobby where, flanked with death and terror and the busy matter-of-factness of the nurses and the hundred flitting shapes of the quiet men with the gray faces and gimlet eyes who walk so surely in among the broken lives—with arms proposed in an attitude of enormous mercy—many times bigger than Gant's largest angel—is an image of gentle Jesus.

Eugene went to see the Leonards several times. Margaret looked thin and ill, but the great light in her seemed on this account to burn more brightly. Never before had he been so aware of her enormous tranquil patience, the great health of her spirit. All of his sin, all of his pain, all the vexed weariness of his soul were washed away in that deep radiance: the tumult and evil of life dropped from him its foul and ragged cloak. He seemed to be clothed anew in garments of seamless light.

But he could confess little that lay on his heart: he talked freely of his work at the university, he talked of little else. His heart was packed with its burden for confessional, but he knew he could not speak, that she would not understand. She was too wise for anything but faith. Once, desperately, he tried to tell her of Laura: he blurted out a confession awkwardly in a few words. Before he had finished she began to laugh.

"Mr. Leonard!" she called. "Imagine this rascal with a girl! Pshaw, boy! You don't know what love is. Get along with you. There'll be time enough to think of that ten years from now." She laughed tenderly to herself, with absent misty gaze.

"Old 'Gene with a girl! Pity the poor girl! Ah, Lord, boy! That's a long way off for you. Thank your stars!"

He bent his head sharply, and closed his eyes. O! My lovely Saint! he thought. How close you have been to me, if any one. How I have cut my brain open for you to see, and would my heart, if I had dared, and how alone I am, and always have been.

He walked through the streets at night with Irene Mallard; the town was thinned and saddened by departures. A few people hurried past, as if driven along by the brief pouncing gusts of wind. He was held in the lure of her subtle weariness: she gave him comfort and he never touched her. But he unpacked the burden of his heart, trembling and passionate. She sat beside him and stroked his hand. It seemed to him that he never knew her until he remembered her years later.

The house was almost empty. At night Eliza packed his trunk carefully, counting the ironed shirts and mended socks with satisfaction.

"Now, you have plenty of good warm clothes, son. Try to take care of them." She put Gant's check in his inner pocket and fastened it with a safety-pin.

"Keep a sharp eye on your money, boy. You never know who you'll run up with on a train."

He dawdled nervously toward the door, wishing to melt away, not end in leave-taking.

"It does seem you might spend one night at home with your mother," she said querulously. Her eyes grew misty at once, her lips began to work tremulously in a bitter self-pitying smile. "I tell you what! It looks mighty funny, doesn't it? You can't stay with me five minutes any more without wanting to be up and off with the first woman that comes along. It's all right! It's all right. I'm not complaining. It seems as if all I was fit for is to cook and sew and get you ready to go off." She burst volubly into tears. "It seems that that's the only use you have for me. I've hardly laid eyes on you all summer."

"No," he said bitterly, "you've been too busy looking after the boarders. Don't think, mama, that you can work on my feelings here at the last minute," he cried, already deeply worked-on. "It's easy to cry. But I was here all the time if you had had time for me. Oh, for God's sake! Let's make an end to this! Aren't things bad enough without it? Why must you act this way whenever I go off? Do you want to make me as miserable as you can?"

"Well, I tell you," said Eliza hopefully, becoming dry-eyed at once, "if I make a couple of deals and everything goes well, you may find me waiting for you in a big fine house when you come back next Spring. I've got the lot picked out. I was thinking about it the other day," she went on, giving him a bright and knowing nod.

"Ah-h!" he made a strangling noise in his throat and tore at his collar. "In God's name! Please!" There was a silence.

"Well," said Eliza gravely, plucking at her chin, "I want you to be a good boy and study hard, son. Take care of your money—I want you to have plenty of good food and warm clothes—but you mustn't be extravagant, boy. This sickness of your papa's has cost a lot of money. Everything is going out and nothing's coming in. Nobody knows where the next dollar's coming from. So you've got to watch out."

Again silence fell. She had said her say; she had come as close as she could, but suddenly she felt speechless, shut out, barred from the bitter and lonely secrecy of his life.

"I hate to see you go, son," she said quietly, with a deep and indefinable sadness.

He cast his arms up suddenly in a tortured incomplete gesture.

"What does it matter! Oh God, what does it matter!"

Eliza's eyes filled with tears of real pain. She grasped his hand and held it.

"Try to be happy, son," she wept, "try to be a little more happy. Poor child! Poor child! Nobody ever knew you. Before you were born," she shook her head slowly, speaking in a voice that was drowned and husky with her tears. Then, huskily, clearing her throat, she repeated, "Before you were born——"

XXXII

WHEN he returned to the university for his second year, he found the place adjusted soberly to war. It seemed quieter, sadder—the number of students was smaller and they were younger. The older ones had gone to war. The others were in a state of wild, but subdued, restlessness. They were careless of colleges, careers, successes—the war had thrilled them with its triumphing *Now.* Of what use To-morrow! Of what use all labor for To-morrow! The big guns had blown all spun schemes to fragments: they hailed the end of all planned work with a fierce, a secret joy. The business of education went on half-heartedly, with an abstracted look: in the classroom, their eyes were vague upon the book, but their ears cocked attentively for alarums and excursions without.

Eugene began the year earnestly as room-mate of a young man who had been the best student in the Altamont High School. His name was Bob Sterling. Bob Sterling was nineteen years old, the son of a widow. He was of middling height, always very neatly and soberly dressed; there was nothing conspicuous about him. For this reason, he could laugh good-naturedly, a little smugly, at whatever was conspicuous. He had a good mind—bright, attentive, studious, unmarked by originality or inventiveness. He had a time for everything: he apportioned a certain time for the preparation of each lesson, and went over it three times, mumbling rapidly to himself. He sent his laundry out every Monday. When in merry company he laughed heartily and enjoyed himself, but he always kept track of the time. Presently, he would look at his watch, saying: "Well, this is all very nice, but it's getting no work done," and he would go.

Every one said he had a bright future. He remonstrated with Eugene, with good-natured seriousness, about his habits. He ought not to throw his clothes around. He ought not to let his shirts and drawers accumulate in a dirty pile. He ought to have a regular time for doing each lesson; he ought to live by regular hours.

They lived in a private dwelling on the edge of the campus, in a large bright room decorated with a great number of college pennants, all of which belonged to Bob Sterling.

Bob Sterling had heart-disease. He stood on the landing, gasping, when he had climbed the stairs. Eugene opened the door for him. Bob Sterling's pleasant face was dead white, spotted by pale freckles. His lips chattered and turned blue.

"What is it, Bob? How do you feel?" said Eugene.

"Come here," said Bob Sterling with a grin. "Put your head down here." He took Eugene's head and placed it against his heart. The great pump beat slowly and irregularly, with a hissing respiration.

"Good God!" cried Eugene.

"Do you hear it?" said Bob Sterling, beginning to laugh. Then he went into the room, chafing his dry hands briskly.

But he fell sick and could not attend classes. He was taken to the College Infirmary, where he lay for several weeks, apparently not very ill, but with lips constantly blue, a slow pulse, and a sub-normal temperature. Nothing could be done about it.

His mother came and took him home. Eugene wrote him regularly twice a week, getting in return short but cheerful messages. Then one day he died.

Two weeks later the widow returned to gather together the boy's belongings. Silently she collected the clothing that no one would ever wear. She was a stout woman in her forties. Eugene took all the pennants from the wall and folded them. She packed them in a valise and turned to go.

"Here's another," said Eugene.

She burst suddenly into tears and seized his hand.

"He was so brave," she said, "so brave. Those last days—I had not meant to— Your letters made him so happy."

She's alone now, Eugene thought.

I cannot stay here, he thought, where he has been. We were here together. Always I should see him on the landing, with the hissing valve and the blue lips, or hear him mumbling his lessons. Then, at night, the other cot would be empty. I think I shall room alone hereafter.

But he roomed the remainder of the term in one of the dormitories. He had two room-mates—one, an Altamont young man who answered to the name of L. K. Duncan (the "L" stood for Lawrence, but every one called him "Elk") and the other, the son of an Episcopal minister, Harold Gay. Both were several years older than Eugene: Elk Duncan was twenty-four, and Harold Gay, twenty-two. But it is doubtful whether a more precious congress of freaks had ever before gathered in two small rooms, one of which they used as a "study."

Elk Duncan was the son of an Altamont attorney, a small Democratic politician, mighty in county affairs. Elk Duncan was tall—an inch or two over six feet—and incredibly thin, or rather narrow. He was already a little bald, he had a high prominent forehead, and large pale bulging eyes: from that point his long pale face sloped backward to his chin. His shoulders were a trifle bowed and very narrow; the rest of his body had the symmetry of a lead pencil. He always dressed very foppishly, in tight suits of blue flannel, with high stiff collars, fat silken cravats, and colored silk handkerchiefs. He was a student in the Law School, but he spent a large part of his time, industriously, in avoiding study.

The younger students—particularly the Freshmen—gathered around him after meals with mouths slightly ajar, feeding upon his words like manna, and hungrily demanding more, the wilder his fable became. His posture toward life was very much that of the barker of a carnival side-show: loquacious, patronizing, and cynical.

The other room-mate, Harold Gay, was a good soul, no older than a child. He wore spectacles, which gave the only glister to the dull grayness of his face; he was plain and ugly without any distinction: he had been puzzled so long by at least four-fifths of the phenomena of existence that he no longer made any effort to comprehend them. Instead, he concealed his shyness and bewilderment under a braying laugh that echoed at all the wrong places, and a silly grin full of an absurd and devilish knowingness. His association with Elk Duncan was one of the proud summits of his life: he weltered in the purple calcium which bathed that worthy, he smoked cigarettes with a debauched leer, and cursed loudly and uneasily with the accent of a depraved clergyman.

"Harold! Harold!" said Elk Duncan reprovingly. "Damn, son! You're getting hard! If you go on like this, you'll begin to chew gum, and fritter away your Sunday-school money at the movies. Think of the rest of us, please. 'Gene here's only a young boy, as pure as a barnyard privy, and, as for me, I've always moved in the best circles, and associated with only the highest class of bartenders and ladylike streetwalkers. What would your father say if he could hear you? Don't you know he'd be shocked? He'd cut off your cigarette money, son."

"I don't give a damn what he'd do, Elk, nor you either!" said Harold toughly, grinning. "So, what the hell!" he roared as loudly as he could. There was an answering howl from the windows of the whole dormitory—cries of "Go to hell!" "Cut it out!" and ironical cheers, at which he was pleased.

The scattered family drew together again at Christmas. A sense of impending dissolution, of loss and death, brought them back. The surgeon at Baltimore had given no hope. He had, rather, confirmed Gant's death-warrant.

"Then how long can he live?" asked Helen.

He shrugged his shoulders. "My dear girl!" he said. "I have no idea. The man's a miracle. Do you know that he's Exhibit A here? Every surgeon in the place has had a look. How long can he last? I'll swear to nothing—I no longer have any idea. When your father left here, the first time, after his operation, I never expected to see him again. I doubted if he would last the winter through. But he's back again. He may be back many times."

"Can you help him at all? Do you think the radium does any good?"

"I can give him relief for a time. I can even check the growth of the disease for a time. Beyond that, I can do nothing.

But his vitality is enormous. He is a creaking gate which hangs by one hinge—but which hangs, nevertheless."

Thus, she had brought him home, the shadow of his death suspended over them like a Damocles sword. Fear prowled softly through their brains on leopard feet. The girl lived in a condition of repressed hysteria: it had its outburst daily at Eliza's or in her own home. Hugh Barton had purchased a house to which he had taken her.

"You'll get no peace," he said, "as long as you're near them. That's what's wrong with you now."

She had frequent periods of sickness. She went constantly to the doctors for treatment and advice. Sometimes she went to the hospital for several days. Her illness manifested itself in various ways—sometimes in a terrible mastoid pain, sometimes in nervous exhaustion, sometimes in an hysterical collapse in which she laughed and wept by turns, and which was governed partly by Gant's illness and a morbid despair over her failure to bear a child. She drank stealthily at all times—she drank in nibbling draughts for stimulus, never enough for drunkenness. She drank vile liquids—seeking only the effect of alcohol and getting at it in strange ways through a dozen abominations called "tonics" and "extracts." Almost deliberately she ruined her taste for the better sort of potable liquors, concealing from herself, under the convenient labellings of physic, the ugly crawling hunger in her blood. This self-deception was characteristic of her. Her life expressed itself through a series of deceptions—of symbols: her dislikes, affections, grievances, brandishing every cause but the real one.

But, unless actually bedridden, she was never absent from her father for many hours. The shadow of his death lay over their lives. They shuddered below its horror; its protracted menace, its unsearchable enigma, deprived them of dignity and courage. They were dominated by the weary and degrading egotism of life, which is blandly philosophical over the death of the alien, but sees in its own the corruption of natural law. It was as hard for them to think of Gant's death as of God's death: it was a great deal harder, because he was more real to them than God, he was more immortal than God, he was God.

This hideous twilight into which their lives had passed froze Eugene with its terror, and choked him with fury. He would grow enraged after reading a letter from home and pound the grained plaster of the dormitory wall until his knuckles were bloody. They have taken his courage away! he thought. They have made a whining coward out of him! No, and if I die, no damned family about. Blowing their messy breaths in your face! Snuffling down their messy noses at you! Gathering around you till you can't breathe. Telling you how well you're looking with hearty smiles, and boo-hooing behind your back. O messy, messy, messy death! Shall we never be alone? Shall we never live alone, think alone, live in a house by ourselves alone? Ah! but I shall! I shall! Alone, alone, and far away, with falling rain. Then, bursting suddenly into the study, he found Elk Duncan, with unaccustomed eye bent dully upon a page of Torts, a bright bird held by the stare of that hypnotic snake, the law.

"Are we to die like rats?" he said. "Are we to smother in a hole?"

"Damn!" said Elk Duncan, folding the big calfskin and cowering defensively behind it.

"Yes, that's right, that's right! Calm yourself. You are Napoleon Bonaparte and I'm your old friend, Oliver Cromwell. Harold!" he called. "Help! He killed the keeper and got out."

"'Gene!" yelled Harold Gay, hurling a thick volume from him under the spell of Elk's great names. "What do you know about history? Who signed Magna Charta, eh?"

"It wasn't signed," said Eugene. "The King didn't know how to write, so they mimeographed it."

"Correct!" roared Harold Gay. "Who was Æthelred the Unready?"

"He was the son of Cynewulf the Silly and Undine the Unwashed," said Eugene.

"On his Uncle Jasper's side," said Elk Duncan, "he was related to Paul the Poxy and Genevieve the Ungenerous."

"He was excommunicated by the Pope in a Bull of the year 903, but he refused to be cowed," said Eugene.

"Instead, he called together all the local clergy, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Gay, who was elected Pope," said Elk Duncan. "This caused a great schism in the Church."

"But as usual, God was on the side of the greatest number of canons," said Eugene. "Later on, the family migrated to California, and made its fortune in the Gold Rush of '49."

"You boys are too good for me!" yelled Harold Gay, getting up abruptly. "Come on! Who's going to the Pic?"

The Pic was the only purchasable entertainment that the village afforded steadily. It was a moving-picture theatre, inhabited nightly by a howling tribe of students who rushed down aisles, paved with peanut-shells, through a shrapnel fire of flying goobers, devoting themselves studiously for the remainder of the evening to the unhappy heads and necks of Freshmen, and less attentively, but with roars of applause, indignation, or advice, to the poor flicker-dance of puppets that wavered its way illegibly across the worn and pleated screen. A weary but industrious young woman with a scrawny neck thumped almost constantly at a battered piano. If she was idle for five minutes, the whole pack howled ironically, demanding: "Music, Myrtle! Music!"

It was necessary to speak to every one. If one spoke to every one, one was "democratic"; if one did not, one was a snob, and got few votes. The appraisal of personality, like all other appraisal with them, was coarse and blunt. They were suspicious of all eminence. They had a hard peasant hostility to the unusual. A man was brilliant? Was there a bright sparkle to him? Bad, bad! He was not safe; he was not sound. The place was a democratic microcosmos—seething with political interests: national, regional, collegiate.

The campus had its candidates, its managers, its bosses, its machines, as had the State. A youngster developed in college the political craft he was later to exert in Party affairs. The son of a politician was schooled by his crafty sire before the down was off his cheeks: at sixteen, his life had been plotted ahead to the governorship, or to the proud dignities of a Congressman. The boy came deliberately to the university to bait and set his first traps; deliberately he made those friendships that were most likely to benefit him later. By his junior year, if he was successful, he had a political manager, who engineered his campus ambitions; he moved with circumspection, and spoke with a trace of pomp nicely weighed with cordiality:

"Ah, there, gentlemen." "Gentlemen, how are you?" "A nice day, gentlemen."

The vast champaign of the world stretched out its limitless wonder, but few were seduced away from the fortress of the State, few ever heard the distant reverberation of an idea. They could get no greater glory for themselves than a seat in the Senate, and the way to glory—the way to all power, highness, and distinction whatsoever—was through the law, a string tie, and a hat. Hence politics, law schools, debating societies, and speechmaking. The applause of listening senates to command.

The yokels, of course, were in the saddle—they composed nine-tenths of the student body: the proud titles were in their gift, and they took good care that their world should be kept safe for yokelry and the homespun virtues. Usually, these dignities—the presidencies of student bodies, classes, Y. M. C. A.'s, and the managerships of athletic teams—were given to some honest serf who had established his greatness behind a plough before working in the college commons, or to some industrious hack who had shown a satisfactory mediocrity in all directions. Such an industrious hack was called an "all-round man." He was safe, sound, and reliable. He would never get notions. He was the fine flower of university training. He was a football scrub, and a respectable scholar in all subjects. He was a universal Two Man. He always got Two on everything, except Moral Character, where he shone with a superlative Oneness. If he did not go into the law or the ministry, he was appointed a Rhodes Scholar.

In this strange place Eugene flourished amazingly. He was outside the pale of popular jealousies: it was quite obvious that he was not safe, that he was not sound, that decidedly he was an irregular person. He could never be an all-round man. Obviously, he would never be governor. Obviously, he would never be a politician, because he said funny things. He was not the man to lead a class or say a prayer; he was a man for curious enterprise. Well, thought they benevolently, we need some such. We are not all made for weighty business.

He was happier than he had ever been in his life, and more careless. His physical loneliness was more complete and more delightful. His escape from the bleak horror of disease and hysteria and death impending, that hung above his crouched family, left him with a sense of aerial buoyancy, drunken freedom. He had come to the place alone, without companions. He had no connections. He had, even now, not one close friend. And this isolation was in his favor. Every one knew him at sight; every one called him by name, and spoke to him kindly. He was not disliked. He was happy, full of expansive joy, he greeted every one with enthusiastic gusto. He had a vast tenderness, an affection for the whole marvellous and unvisited earth, that blinded his eyes. He was closer to a feeling of brotherhood than he had ever been, and more alone. He was filled with a divine indifference for all appearance. Joy ran like a great wine through his young expanding limbs; he bounded down the paths with wild cries in his throat, leaping for life like an apple, trying to focus the blind desire that swept him apart, to melt down to a bullet all of his formless passion, and so, slay death, slay love.

He began to join. He joined everything. He had never "belonged" to any group before, but now all groups were beckoning him. He had without much trouble won a place for himself on the staff of the college paper and the magazine. The small beginning trickle of distinctions widened into a gushet. It began to sprinkle, then it rained. He was initiated into literary fraternities, dramatic fraternities, theatrical fraternities, speaking fraternities, journalistic fraternities, and in the Spring into a social fraternity. He joined enthusiastically, submitted with fanatical glee to the hard mauling of the initiations, and went about lame and sore, more pleased than a child or a savage, with colored ribbons in his coat lapel, and a waistcoat plastered with pins, badges, symbols, and Greek letterings.

But not without labor had his titles come. The early autumn was lustreless and slack: he could not come from the shadow of Laura. She haunted him. When he went home at Christmas, he found the hills bleak and close, and the town mean and cramped in the grim stinginess of winter. There was a ludicrous, a desperate gaiety in the family.

"Well!" said Eliza sorrowfully, as she peered above the stove, "let's all try to be happy this time and enjoy a quiet Christmas. You never know! You never know!" She shook her head, unable to continue. Her eyes were wet. "It may be the last time we're all together. The old trouble! The old trouble!" she said hoarsely, turning to him.

"What old trouble?" he said angrily. "Good God, why are you so mysterious?"

"My heart!" she whispered, with a brave smile. "I've said nothing to any one. But last week—I thought I was gone." This was delivered in a boding whisper.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned. "You'll be here when the rest of us are rotten."

Helen burst into a raucous angry laugh, looking at his sullen face, and prodding him roughly with her big fingers.

"K-K-K-K-K-K-K! Did you ever know it to fail? Did you? If you come to her with one of your kidneys gone, she's always got something worse the matter with her. No, sir! I've never known it to fail!"

"You may laugh! You may laugh!" said Eliza with a smile of watery bitterness. "But I may not be here to laugh at much longer."

"Good heavens, mama!" the girl cried irritably. "There's nothing wrong with you. You're not the sick one! Papa's the sick one. He's the one that needs attention. Can't you realize that—he's dying. He may not last the winter out. I'm the sick one! You'll be here long after we're both gone."

"You never know," said Eliza mysteriously. "You never know who'll be the first one to go. Only last week, there was Mr. Cosgrave, as fine a looking man as——"

"They're off!" Eugene screamed with a crazy laugh, stamping up and down the kitchen in a frenzy. "By God! They're off!"

At this moment, one of the aged harpies, of whom the house always sheltered two or three during the grim winter, lurched from the hall back into the door-space. She was a large raw-boned hag, a confirmed drug-eater, who moved by a violent and dissonant jerking of her gaunt limbs, pawing abruptly at the air with a gnarled hand.

"Mrs. Gant," said she, writhing her loose gray lips horribly before she could speak. "Did I get a letter? Have you seen him?"

"Seen who? Go on!" said Eliza fretfully. "I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't believe you do, either."

Smiling hideously at them all, and pawing the air, the monster got under way again, disappearing like an old wagon with loose wheels. Helen began to laugh, hoarsely, as Eugene's face hung forward with mouth half-open in an expression of sullen stupefaction. Eliza laughed, too, slily, rubbing her nosewing with a finger.

"I'll vow!" she said. "I believe she's crazy. She takes dope of some sort—that's certain. It makes my flesh crawl when she comes around."

"Then why do you keep her in the house?" said Helen resentfully. "Good heavens, mama! You could get rid of her if you wanted to. Poor old 'Gene!" she said, beginning to laugh again. "You always catch it, don't you?"

"The time draws near the birth of Christ," said he, piously.

She laughed; then, with abstracted eyes, plucked vaguely at her large chin.

His father spent most of the day staring vacantly into the parlor fire. Miss Florry Mangle, the nurse, gave him the morbid comfort of her silence: she rocked incessantly before the fire, thirty heel-taps to the minute, with arms tight-folded on her limp breasts. Occasionally she talked of death and disease. Gant had aged and wasted shockingly. His heavy clothes wound round his feeble shanks: his face was waxen and transparent—it was like a great beak. He looked clean and fragile. The cancer, Eugene thought, flowered in him like some terrible but beautiful plant. His mind was very clear, not doting, but sad and old. He spoke little, with almost comical gentleness, but he ceased to listen almost as soon as one answered.

"How have you been, son?" he asked. "Are you getting along all right?"

"Yes. I am a reporter on the paper now; I may be managing editor next year. I have been elected to several organizations," he went on eagerly, glad of the rare chance to speak to one of them about his life. But when he looked up again, his father's stare was fixed sadly in the fire. The boy stopped in confusion, pierced with a bitter pain.

"That's good," said Gant, hearing him speak no more. "Be a good boy, son. We're proud of you."

Ben came home two days before Christmas: he prowled through the house like a familiar ghost. He had left the town early in the autumn, after his return from Baltimore. For three months he had wandered alone through the South, selling to the merchants in small towns space for advertisements upon laundry cards. How well this curious business succeeded he did not say: he was scrupulously neat, but threadbare and haggard, and more fiercely secretive than ever. He had found employment at length upon a newspaper in a rich tobacco town of the Piedmont. He was going there after Christmas.

He had come to them, as always, bearing gifts.

Luke came in from the naval school at Newport, on Christmas eve. They heard his sonorous tenor shouting greetings to people in the street; he entered the house upon a blast of air. Every one began to grin.

"Well, here we are! The Admiral's back! Papa, how's the boy! Well, for God's sake!" he cried, embracing Gant, and slapping his back. "I thought I was coming to see a sick man! You're looking like the flowers that bloom in the Spring."

"Pretty well, my boy. How are you?" said Gant, with a pleased grin.

"Couldn't be better, Colonel. 'Gene, how are you, Old Scout? Good!" he said, without waiting for an answer. "Well, well, if it isn't Old Baldy," he cried, pumping Ben's hand. "I didn't know whether you'd be here or not. Mama, old girl," he said, as he embraced her, "how're they going? Still hitting on all six. Fine!" he yelled, before any one could reply to anything.

"Why, son,—what on earth!" cried Eliza, stepping back to look at him. "What have you done to yourself? You walk as if you are lame."

He laughed idiotically at sight of her troubled face and prodded her.

"Whah—whah! I got torpedoed by a submarine," he said. "Oh, it's nothing," he added modestly. "I gave a little skin to help out a fellow in the electrical school."

"What!" Eliza screamed. "How much did you give?"

"Oh, only a little six-inch strip," he said carelessly. "The boy was badly burned: a bunch of us got together and chipped in with a little hide."

"Mercy!" said Eliza. "You'll be lame for life. It's a wonder you can walk."

"He always thinks of others—that boy!" said Gant proudly. "He'd give you his heart's-blood."

The sailor had secured an extra valise, and stocked it on the way home with a great variety of beverages for his father. There were several bottles of Scotch and rye whiskies, two of gin, one of rum, and one each of port and sherry wine.

Every one grew mildly convivial before the evening meal.

"Let's give the poor kid a drink," said Helen. "It won't hurt him."

"What! My ba-a-by! Why, son, you wouldn't drink, would you?" Eliza said playfully.

"Wouldn't he!" said Helen, prodding him. "Ho! ho! ho!"

She poured him out a stiff draught of Scotch whiskey.

"There!" she said cheerfully. "That's not going to hurt him."

"Son," said Eliza gravely, balancing her wine-glass, "I don't want you ever to acquire a taste for it." She was still loyal to the doctrine of the good Major.

"No," said Gant. "It'll ruin you quicker than anything in the world, if you do."

"You're a goner, boy, if that stuff ever gets you," said Luke. "Take a fool's advice."

They lavished fair warnings on him as he lifted his glass. He choked as the fiery stuff caught in his young throat, stopping his breath for a moment and making him tearful. He had drunk a few times before—minute quantities that his sister had given him at Woodson Street. Once, with Jim Trivett, he had fancied himself tipsy.

When they had eaten, they drank again. He was allowed a small one. Then they all departed for town to complete their belated shopping. He was left alone in the house.

What he had drunk beat pleasantly through his veins in warm pulses, bathing the tips of ragged nerves, giving to him a feeling of power and tranquillity he had never known. Presently, he went to the pantry where the liquor was stored. He took a water tumbler and filled it experimentally with equal portions of whiskey, gin, and rum. Then, seating himself at the kitchen table, he began to drink the mixture slowly.

The terrible draught smote him with the speed and power of a man's fist. He was made instantly drunken, and he knew instantly why men drank. It was, he knew, one of the great moments in his life—he lay, greedily watching the mastery of the grape over his virgin flesh, like a girl for the first time in the embrace of her lover. And suddenly, he knew how completely he was his father's son—how completely, and with what added power and exquisite refinement of sensation, was he Gantian. He exulted in the great length of his limbs and his body, through which the mighty liquor could better work its wizardry. In all the earth there was no other like him, no other fitted to be so sublimely and magnificently drunken. It was greater than all the music he had ever heard; it was as great as the highest poetry. Why had he never been told? Why had no one ever written adequately about it? Why, when it was possible to buy a god in a bottle, and drink him off, and become a god oneself, were men not forever drunken?

He had a moment of great wonder—the magnificent wonder with which we discover the simple and unspeakable things that lie buried and known, but unconfessed, in us. So might a man feel if he wakened after death and found himself in Heaven.

Then a divine paralysis crept through his flesh. His limbs were numb; his tongue thickened until he could not bend it to the cunning sounds of words. He spoke aloud, repeating difficult phrases over and over, filled with wild laughter and delight at his effort. Behind his drunken body his brain hung poised like a falcon, looking on him with scorn, with tenderness, looking on all laughter with grief and pity. There lay in him something that could not be seen and could not be touched, which was above and beyond him—an eye within an eye, a brain above a brain, the Stranger that dwelt in him and regarded him and was him, and that he did not know. But, thought he, I am alone now in this house; if I can come to know him, I will.

He got up, and reeled out of the alien presences of light and warmth in the kitchen; he went out into the hall where a dim light burned and the high walls gave back their grave-damp chill. This, he thought, is the house.

He sat down upon the hard mission settle, and listened to the cold drip of silence. This is the house in which I have been an exile. There is a stranger in the house, and there's a stranger in me.

O house of Admetus, in whom (although I was a god) I have endured so many things. Now, house, I am not afraid. No ghost need fear come by me. If there's a door in silence, let it open. My silence can be greater than your own. And you who are in me, and who I am, come forth beyond this quiet shell of flesh that makes no posture to deny you. There is none to look at us: O come, my brother and my lord, with unbent face. If I had 40,000 years, I should give all but the ninety last to silence. I should grow to the earth like a hill or a rock. Unweave the fabric of nights and days; unwind my life back to my birth; subtract me into nakedness again, and build me back with all the sums I have not counted. Or let me look upon the living face of darkness; let me hear the terrible sentence of your voice.

There was nothing but the living silence of the house: no doors were opened.

Presently, he got up and left the house. He wore no hat or coat; he could not find them. The night was blanketed in a thick steam of mist: sounds came faintly and cheerfully. Already the earth was full of Christmas. He remembered that he had bought no gifts. He had a few dollars in his pocket; before the shops closed he must get presents for the family. Bareheaded he set off for the town. He knew that he was drunk and that he staggered; but he believed that with care and control he could hide his state from any one who saw him. He straddled the line that ran down the middle of the concrete sidewalk, keeping his eyes fixed on it and coming back to it quickly when he lurched away from it. When he got into the town the streets were thronged with late shoppers. An air of completion was on everything. The people were streaming home to Christmas. He plunged down from the Square into the narrow avenue, going in among the staring passersby. He kept his eye hotly on the line before him. He did not know where to go. He did not know what to buy.

As he reached the entrance to Wood's pharmacy, a shout of laughter went up from the lounging beaux. The next instant he was staring into the friendly grinning faces of Julius Arthur and Van Yeats.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" said Julius Arthur.

He tried to explain; a thick jargon broke from his lips.

"He's cock-eyed drunk," said Van Yeats.

"You look out for him, Van," said Julius. "Get him in a doorway, so none of his folks will see him. I'll get the car."

Van Yeats propped him carefully against the wall; Julius Arthur ran swiftly into Church Street, and drew up in a moment at the curb. Eugene had a vast inclination to slump carelessly upon the nearest support. He placed his arms around their shoulders and collapsed. They wedged him between them on the front seat; somewhere bells were ringing.

"Ding-dong!" he said, very cheerfully. "Cris-muss!"

They answered with a wild yell of laughter.

The house was still empty when they came to it. They got him out of the car, and staggered up the steps with him. He was sorry enough that their fellowship was broken.

"Where's your room, 'Gene?" said Julius Arthur, panting, as they entered the hall.

"This one's as good as any," said Van Yeats.

The door of the front bed-room, opposite the parlor, was open. They took him in and put him on the bed.

"Let's take off his shoes," said Julius Arthur. They unlaced them and pulled them off.

"Is there anything else you want, son?" said Julius.

He tried to tell them to undress him, put him below the covers, and close the door, in order to conceal his defection from his family, but he had lost the power of speech. After looking and grinning at him for a moment, they went out without closing the door.

When they had gone he lay upon the bed, unable to move. He had no sense of time, but his mind worked very clearly. He knew that he should rise, fasten the door, and undress. But he was paralyzed.

Presently the Gants came home. Eliza alone was still in town, pondering over gifts. It was after eleven o'clock. Gant, his daughter, and his two sons came into the room and stared at him. When they spoke to him, he burred helplessly.

"Speak! Speak!" yelled Luke, rushing at him and choking him vigorously. "Are you dumb, idiot?"

I shall remember that, he thought.

"Have you no pride? Have you no honor? Has it come to this?" the sailor roared dramatically, striding around the room.

Doesn't he think he's hell, though? Eugene thought. He could not fashion words, but he could make sounds, ironically, in the rhythm of his brother's moralizing. "Tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh! Tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh! Tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh!" he said, with accurate mimicry. Helen, loosening his collar, bent over him laughing. Ben grinned swiftly under a cleft scowl.

Have you no this? Have you no that? Have you no this? Have you no that?—he was cradled in their rhythm. No, ma'am. We've run out of honor to-day, but we have a nice fresh lot of self-respect.

"Ah, be quiet," Ben muttered. "No one's dead, you know."

"Go heat some water," said Gant professionally, "he's got to get it off his stomach." He no longer seemed old. His life in a marvellous instant came from its wasting shadow; it took on a hale sinew of health and action.

"Save the fireworks," said Helen to Luke, as she left the room. "Close the door. For heaven's sake, try to keep it from mama, if you can."

This is a great moral issue, thought Eugene. He began to feel sick.

Helen returned in a very few minutes with a kettle of hot water, a glass, and a box of soda. Gant fed him the solution mercilessly until he began to vomit. At the summit of his convulsion Eliza appeared. He lifted his sick head dumbly from the bowl, and saw her white face at the door, and her weak brown eyes, that could take on so much sharpness and sparkle when her suspicion was awakened.

"Hah? Huh? What is it?" said Eliza.

But she knew, of course, instantly, what it was.

"What say?" she asked sharply. No one had said anything. He grinned feebly at her, tickled, above his nausea and grief, at the palpable assumption of blind innocence which always heralded her discoveries. Seeing her thus, they all laughed.

"Oh, my Lord!" said Helen. "Here she is. We were hoping you wouldn't get here till it was over. Come and look at your Baby," she said, with a good-humored snicker, keeping his head comfortably supported on the palm of her hand.

"How do you feel now, son?" Gant asked kindly.

"Better," he mumbled, discovering, with some elation, that his vocal paralysis was not permanent.

"Well, you see!" Helen began, kindly enough, but with a brooding satisfaction. "It only goes to show we're all alike. We all like it. It's in our blood."

"That awful curse!" Eliza said. "I had hoped that I might have one son who might escape it. It seems," she said, bursting into tears, "as if a Judgment were on us. The sins of the fathers——"

"Oh! for heaven's sake!" Helen cried angrily. "Stop it! It's not going to kill him: he'll learn a lesson from it."

Gant gnawed his thin lip, and wetted his great thumb in the old manner.

"You might know," he said, "that I'd get the blame for it. Yes—if one of them broke a leg it would be the same."

"There's one thing sure!" said Eliza. "None of them ever got it from my side of the house. Say what you will, his grandfather, Major Pentland, never in his life allowed a drop in his house."

"Major Pentland be damned!" said Gant. "If you'd depended on him for anything you'd have gone hungry."

Certainly, thought Eugene, you'd have gone thirsty.

"Forget it!" said Helen. "It's Christmas. Let's try to have a little peace and quiet once a year."

When they had left him, the boy tried to picture them lulled in the dulcet tranquillity they so often invoked. Its effects, he thought, would be more disastrous than any amount of warfare.

In the darkness, everything around and within him, swam hideously. But presently he slid down into a pit of distressed sleep.

Every one had agreed on a studious forgiveness. They stepped with obtrusive care around his fault, filled pleasantly with Christmas and mercy. Ben scowled at him quite naturally, Helen grinned and prodded him, Eliza and Luke surrendered themselves to sweetness, sorrow, and silence. Their forgiveness made a loud noise in his ears.

During the morning his father asked him to come for a walk. Gant was embarrassed and hang-dog: a duty of gentle admonishment devolved upon him—he had been counselled to it by Helen and Eliza. Now, no man in his time could carry on in the big, Bow-wow style better than Gant, but none was less fitted to scatter the blossoms of sweetness and light. His wrath was sudden, his invective sprang from the moment, but he had for this occasion no thunder-bolts in his quiver, and no relish for the business before him. He had a feeling of personal guilt; he felt like a magistrate fining for intoxication a culprit with whom he has been on a spree the night before. Besides—what if the Bacchic strain in him had been passed on to his son?

They walked on in silence across the Square, by the rimmed fountain. Gant cleared his throat nervously several times.

"Son," said he presently, "I hope you'll take last night as a warning. It would be a terrible thing if you let whiskey get the best of you. I'm not going to speak harshly to you about it: I hope you'll learn a lesson by it. You had better be dead than become a drunkard."

There! He was glad it was over.

"I will!" Eugene said. He was filled with gratitude and relief. How good every one was. He wanted to make passionate avowals, great promises. He tried to speak. But he couldn't. There was too much to be said.

But they had their Christmas, beginning thus with parental advice and continuing through all the acts of contrition, love, and decorum. They put on, over their savage lives, the raiment of society, going diligently through the forms and conventions, and thinking, "now, we are like all other families"; but they were timid and shy and stiff, like rustics dressed in evening-clothes.

But they could not keep silence. They were not ungenerous or mean: they were simply not bred to any restraint. Helen veered in the wind of hysteria, the strong uncertain tides of her temperament. At times when, before her own fire, her vitality sank, and she heard the long howl of the wind outside, she almost hated Eugene.

"It's ridiculous!" she said to Luke. "His behaving like this. He's only a kid—he's had everything, we've had nothing! You see what it's come to, don't you?"

"His college education has ruined him," said the sailor, not unhappy that his candle might burn more brightly in a naughty world.

"Why don't you speak to her?" she said irritably. "She may listen to you—she won't to me! Tell her so! You've seen how she's rubbed it in to poor old papa, haven't you? Do you think that old man—sick as he is—is to blame? 'Gene's not a Gant, anyway. He takes after her side of the house. He's queer—like all of them! *We're* Gants!" she said with a bitter emphasis.

"There was always some excuse for papa," said the sailor. "He's had a lot to put up with." All his convictions in family affairs had been previously signed with her approval.

"I wish you'd tell her that. With all his moping into books, he's no better than we are. If he thinks he's going to lord it over me, he's mistaken."

"I'd like to see him try it when I'm around," said Luke grimly.

The boy was doing a multiple penance—he had committed his first great wrong in being at once so remote from them and so, near to them. His present trouble was aggravated by the cross-complication of Eliza's thrusts at his father, and the latent but constantly awakening antagonism of mother and daughter. In addition, he bore directly Eliza's nagging and carping attack. All this he was prepared for—it was the weather of his mother's nature (she was as fond of him as of any of them, he thought), and the hostility of Helen and Luke was something implacable, unconscious, fundamental, that grew out of the structure of their lives. He was of them, he was recognizably marked, but he was not with them, nor like them. He had been baffled for years by the passionate enigma of their dislike—their tenders of warmth and affection, when they came, were strange to him: he accepted them gratefully and with a surprise he did not wholly conceal. Otherwise, he had grown into a shell of sullenness and quiet: he spoke little in the house.

He was wearing ragged from the affair and its consequences. He felt that he was being unfairly dealt with, but as the hammering went on he drew his head bullishly down and held his tongue, counting the hours until his holiday should end. He turned silently to Ben—he should have turned nowhere. But the trusted brother, frayed and bitter on his own accord, scowled bitterly, and gave him the harsh weight of his tongue. This finally was unendurable. He felt betrayed—utterly turned against and set upon.

The outbreak came three nights before his departure as he stood, tense and stolid, in the parlor. For almost an hour, in a savage monotone, Ben had tried deliberately, it seemed, to goad him to an attack. He had listened without a word, smothering in pain and fury, and enraging by his silence the older brother who was finding a vent for his own alien frustration.

"—and don't stand there scowling at me, you little thug. I'm telling you for your own good. I'm only trying to keep you from being a jailbird, you know."

"The trouble with you," said Luke, "is that you have no appreciation for what's been done for you. Everything's been done for you, and you haven't sense enough to appreciate it. Your college education has ruined you."

The boy turned slowly on Ben.

"All right, Ben," he muttered. "That's enough, now. I don't care what he says, but I've had enough of it from you."

This was the admission the older one had wanted. They were all in very chafed and ugly temper.

"Don't talk back to me, you little fool, or I'll bat your brains out."

The boy sprang at his brother like a cat, with a snarling cry. He bore him backward to the floor as if he were a child, laying him down gently and kneeling above him, because he had been instantly shocked by the fragility of his opponent and the ease of his advantage. He struggled with such mixed rage and shame as those who try quietly to endure the tantrum of a trying brat. As he knelt above Ben, holding his arms pinned, Luke fell heavily on his back, uttering excited cries, strangling him with one arm and cuffing awkwardly with the other.

"All right, B-B-Ben," he chattered, "you grab his legs."

A free scrimmage upon the floor followed, with such a clatter of upset scuttles, fire-irons, and chairs, that Eliza was brought at a fast gallop from the kitchen.

"Mercy!" she shrieked, as she reached the door. "They'll kill him!"

But, although being subdued—in the proud language of an older South "defeated, sir, but never beaten"—Eugene was doing very well for his age, and continued to chill the spines of his enemies with strange noises in his larynx, even after they had all clambered panting to their feet.

"I f-f-f-fink he's gone crazy," said Luke. "He j-j-jumped on us without a word of warning."

The hero replied to this with a drunken roll of the head, a furious dilation of the nostrils, and another horrible noise in his throat.

"What's to become of us!" wept Eliza. "When brother strikes brother, it seems that the smash-up has come." She lifted the padded arm-chair, and placed it on its legs again.

When he could speak, Eugene said quietly, to control the trembling of his voice:

"I'm sorry I jumped on you, Ben. You," he said to the excited sailor, "jumped on my back like a coward. But I'm sorry for what's happened. I'm sorry for what I did the other night and now. I said so, and you wouldn't leave me alone. You've tried to drive me crazy with your talk. And I didn't," he choked, "I didn't think you'd turn against me as you have. I know what the others are like—they hate me!"

"Hate you!" cried Luke excitedly. "For G-g-god's sake! You talk like a fool. We're only trying to help you, for your own good. Why should we hate you!"

"Yes, you hate me," Eugene said, "and you're ashamed to admit it. I don't know why you should, but you do. You wouldn't ever admit anything like that, but it's the truth. You're afraid of the right words. But it's been different with you," he said, turning to Ben. "We've been like brothers—and now, you've gone over against me."

"Ah!" Ben muttered, turning away nervously. "You're crazy. I don't know what you're talking about!" He lighted a cigarette, holding the match in a hand that trembled.

But although the boy had used a child's speech of woe and resentment, they knew there was a core of truth in what he had said.

"Children, children!" said Eliza sadly. "We must try to love one another. Let's try to get along together this Christmas—what time's left. It may be the last one we'll ever have together." She began to weep: "I've had such a hard life," she said, "it's been strife and turmoil all the way. It does seem I deserve a little peace and happiness now."

They were touched with the old bitter shame: they dared not look at one another. But they were awed and made quiet by the vast riddle of pain and confusion that scarred their lives.

"No one, 'Gene," Luke began quietly, "has turned against you. We want to help you—to see you amount to something. You're the last chance—if booze gets you the way it has the rest of us, you're done for."

The boy felt very tired; his voice was flat and low. He began to speak with the bluntness of despair: what he said had undebatable finality.

"And how are you going to keep booze from getting me, Luke?" he said. "By jumping on my back and trying to strangle me? That's on a level with every other effort you've ever made to know me."

"Oh," said Luke ironically, "you don't think we understand you?"

"No," Eugene said quietly. "I don't think you do. You know nothing whatever about me. I know nothing about you—or any of you. I have lived here with you for seventeen years and I'm a stranger. In all that time have you ever talked to me like a brother? Have you ever told me anything of yourself? Have you ever tried to be a friend or a companion to me?"

"I don't know what you want," Luke answered, "but I thought I was acting for the best. As to telling you about myself, what do you want to know?"

"Well," said Eugene slowly, "you're six years older than I am: you've been away to school, you've worked in big cities, and you are now enlisted in the United States Navy Why do you always act like God Almighty," he continued with rankling bitterness. "I know what sailors do! You're no better than I am! What about liquor? What about women?"

"That's no way to talk before your mother," said Luke sternly.

"No, son," said Eliza in a troubled voice. "I don't like that way of talking."

"Then I won't talk like that," Eugene said. "But I had expected you to say that. We do not want to be told what we know. We do not want to call things by their names, although we're willing to call one another bad ones. We call meanness nobility and hatred honor. The way to make yourself a hero is to make me out a scoundrel. You won't admit that either, but it's true. Well, then, Luke, we won't talk of the ladies, black or white, you may or may not know, because it would make you uncomfortable. Instead, you can keep on being God and I'll listen to your advice, like a little boy in Sunday school. But I'd rather read the Ten Commandments where it's written down shorter and better."

"Son," said Eliza again with her ancient look of trouble and frustration, "we must try to get on together."

"No," he said. "Alone. I have done an apprenticeship here with you for seventeen years, but it is coming to an end. I know

now that I shall escape; I know that I have been guilty of no great crime against you, and I am no longer afraid of you."

"Why, boy!" said Eliza. "We've done all we could for you. What crime have we accused you of?"

"Of breathing your air, of eating your food, of living under your roof, of having your life and your blood in my veins, of accepting your sacrifice and privation, and of being ungrateful for it all."

"We should all be thankful for what we have," said Luke sententiously. "Many a fellow would give his right eye for the chance you've been given."

"I've been given nothing!" said Eugene, his voice mounting with a husky flame of passion. "I'll go bent over no longer in this house. What chance I have I've made for myself in spite of you all, and over your opposition. You sent me away to the university when you could do nothing else, when it would have been a crying disgrace to you among the people in this town if you hadn't. You sent me off after the Leonards had cried me up for three years, and then you sent me a year too soon—before I was sixteen—with a box of sandwiches, two suits of clothes, and instructions to be a good boy."

"They sent you some money, too," said Luke. "Don't forget that."

"I'd be the only one who would, if I did," the boy answered. "For that is really what is behind everything, isn't it? My crime the other night was not in getting drunk, but in getting drunk without any money of my own. If I did badly at the university with money of my own, you'd dare say nothing, but if I do well on money you gave me, I must still be reminded of your goodness and my unworthiness."

"Why, son!" said Eliza diplomatically, "no one has a word to say against the way you've done your work. We're very proud of you."

"You needn't be," he said sullenly. "I've wasted a great deal of time and some money. But I've had something out of it—more than most—I've done as much work for my wages as you deserve. I've given you a fair value for your money; I thank you for nothing."

"What's that! What's that!" said Eliza sharply.

"I said I thank you for nothing, but I take that back."

"That's better!" said Luke.

"Yes, I have a great deal to give thanks for," said Eugene. "I give thanks for every dirty lust and hunger that crawled through the polluted blood of my noble ancestors. I give thanks for every scrofulous token that may ever come upon me. I give thanks for the love and mercy that kneaded me over the washtub the day before my birth. I give thanks for the country slut who nursed me and let my dirty bandage fester across my navel. I give thanks for every blow and curse I had from any of you during my childhood, for every dirty cell you ever gave me to sleep in, for the ten million hours of cruelty or indifference, and the thirty minutes of cheap advice."

"Unnatural!" Eliza whispered. "Unnatural son! You will be punished if there's a just God in heaven."

"Oh, there is! I'm sure there is!" cried Eugene. "Because I have been punished. By God, I shall spend the rest of my life getting my heart back, healing and forgetting every scar you put upon me when I was a child. The first move I ever made, after the cradle, was to crawl for the door, and every move I have made since has been an effort to escape. And now at last I am free from you all, although you may hold me for a few years more. If I am not free, I am at least locked up in my own prison, but I shall get me some beauty, I shall get me some order out of this jungle of my life: I shall find my way out of it yet, though it take me twenty years more—alone."

"Alone?" said Eliza, with the old suspicion. "Where are you going?"

"Ah," he said, "you were not looking, were you? I've gone."

XXXIII

During the few remaining days of his holiday, he stayed almost entirely away from the house, coming for a brief and mumbled meal, and late at night, for bed. He waited for departure as a prisoner for release. The dolorous prelude to a journey—the wet platform eyes, the sudden radiation of hectic warmth, the declarations of love at sound of the whistle—left him this time unmoved. The tear-ducts, he was beginning to discover, had, like sweat-glands, dermic foundations, and were easily brought to a salty sparkle at mere sight of a locomotive. He had, therefore, the somewhat detached composure of a gentleman on his way to a comfortable week-end, who stands in a noisy crowd, waiting for the ferry.

He gave benediction to the words in which he had so happily defined his position as wage-earner. They stated and confirmed an attitude, and in some measure protected him against the constant betrayals of sentiment. During the Spring he worked stupendously at joining activities, knowing that here was coin whose ring they could hear. He wrote conscientiously each item of his distinctions; his name found its way back more than once to the indulgent Altamont papers. Gant kept the clippings proudly, and gave public readings when he could.

The boy had two short awkward letters from Ben, who was now stationed one hundred miles away, in the tobacco town. At Easter, Eugene visited him, staying at his lodgings, where again his unerring destiny had thrown him into the welcoming arms of a gray-haired widow. She was under fifty—a handsome silly woman, who prodded and teased him as she would an adored child. She addressed him—with a loose giggle—as "Old Curly-Head," at which he fetched out his usual disgusted plea to his Maker. "O my God! Listen to this!" She had reverted to an astonishing romping girlhood, and would exercise her playfulness by leaping suddenly upon Old Curly-Head, dealing him a stiff dig in the ribs, and skipping away with a triumphant "Hah! Got you that time!"

There was forever in that town a smell of raw tobacco, biting the nostrils with its acrid pungency: it smote the stranger coming from the train, but all the people in the town denied it, saying: "No; there is no smell at all." And within a day the stranger too could smell it no more.

On Easter morning he arose in the blue light and went with the other pilgrims to the Moravian cemetery.

"You ought to see it," Ben said. "It's a famous custom: people come from everywhere." But the older brother did not go. Behind massed bands of horns, the trumpeting blare of trombones, the big crowds moved into the strange burial ground where all the stones lay flat upon the graves—symbol, it was said, of all-levelling Death. But as the horns blared, the old ghoul-fantasy of death returned, the grave slabs made him think of table-cloths: he felt as if he were taking part in some obscene feast.

Spring was coming on again across the earth like a light sparkle of water-spray: all of the men who had died were making their strange and lovely return in blossom and flower. Ben walked along the streets of the tobacco town looking like asphodel. It was strange to find a ghost there in that place: his ancient soul prowled wearily by the cheap familiar brick and all the young façades.

There was a Square on high ground; in the centre a courthouse. Cars were parked in close lines. Young men loitered in the drug-store.

How real it is, Eugene thought. It is like something we have always known about and do not need to see. The town would not have seemed strange to Thomas Aquinas,—but he to the town.

Ben prowled along, greeting the merchants with a grave scowl, leaning his skull against their round skulls of practicality, across their counters—a phantom soliciting advertisement in a quiet monotone.

"This is my kid brother, Mr. Fulton."

"Hello, son! Dogged if they don't grow tall 'uns up there, Ben. Well, if you're like Old Ben, young fellow, we won't kick. We think a lot of him here."

That's like thinking well of Balder, in Connecticut, Eugene thought.

"I have only been here three months," said Ben, resting in bed on his elbow and smoking a cigarette. "But I know all the leading business men already. I'm well thought of here." He glanced at his brother quickly and grinned, with a shy charm of rare confession. But his fierce eyes were desperate and lonely. Hill-haunted? For—home? He smoked.

"You see, they think well of you, once you get away from your people. You'll never have a chance at home, 'Gene. They'll ruin everything for you. For heaven's sake, get away when you can.—What's the matter with you? Why are you looking at me like that?" he said sharply, alarmed at the set stare of the boy's face. In a moment he said: "They'll spoil your life. Can't you forget about her?"

"No," said Eugene. In a moment he added: "She's kept coming back all Spring."

He twisted his throat with a wild cry.

The Spring advanced with a mounting hum of war. The older students fell out quietly and drifted away to enlistments. The younger strained tensely, waiting. The war brought them no sorrow: it was a pageant which might, they felt, pluck them instantly into glory. The country flowed with milk and honey. There were strange rumors of a land of Eldorado to the north, amid the war industry of the Virginia coast. Some of the students had been there, the year before: they brought back stories of princely wages. One could earn twelve dollars a day, with no experience. One could assume the duties of a carpenter, with only a hammer, a saw, and a square. No questions were asked.

War is not death to young men; war is life. The earth had never worn raiment of such color as it did that year. The war seemed to unearth pockets of ore that had never been known in the nation: there was a vast unfolding and exposure of wealth and power. And somehow—this imperial wealth, this display of power in men and money, was blended into a lyrical music. In Eugene's mind, wealth and love and glory melted into a symphonic noise: the age of myth and miracle had come upon the world again. All things were possible.

He went home stretched like a bowstring and announced his intention of going away into Virginia. There was protest, but not loud enough to impede him. Eliza's mind was fastened on real-estate and the summer trade. Gant stared into the darkness at his life. Helen laughed at him and scolded him; then fell to plucking at her chin, absently.

"Can't do without her? You can't fool me! No, sir. I know why you want to go," she said jocularly. "She's a married woman now: she may have a baby, for all you know. You've no right to go after her."

Then abruptly, she said:

"Well, let him go if he wants to. It looks silly to me, but he's got to decide for himself."

He got twenty-five dollars from his father—enough to pay his railway fare to Norfolk and leave him a few dollars.

"Mark my words," said Gant. "You'll be back in a week's time. It's a wild-goose chase you're going on."

He went.

All through the night he drew toward her across Virginia, propped on his elbow in the berth and staring bewitched upon the great romantic country clumped with dreaming woodlands and white as a weird dawn beneath the blazing moonlight.

Early in the morning he came to Richmond. He had to change trains; there was a wait. He went out from the station and walked up the hill toward the fine old State House arenched cleanly in the young morning light. He ate breakfast at a lunchroom on Broad Street, filled already with men going to their work. This casual and brief contact with their lives, achieved after his lonely and magnificent approach through the night, thrilled him by its very casualness. All the little ticking sounds of a city beginning its day, the strange familiarity of voices in an alien place, heard curiously after the thunder of the wheels, seemed magical and unreal. The city had no existence save that which he conferred on it: he wondered how it had lived before he came, how it would live after he left. He looked at all the men, feeding with eyes that held yet the vast moon-meadows of the night and the cool green width of the earth. They were like men in a zoo; he gazed at them, looking for all the little particular markings of the town, the fine mapping upon their limbs and faces of their own little cosmos. And the great hunger for voyages rose up in him—to come always, as now at dawn, into strange cities, striding in among them, and sitting with them unknown, like a god in exile, stored with the enormous vision of the earth.

The counterman yawned and turned the crackling pages of a morning paper. That was strange.

Cars clanked by, beginning to work through the town. Merchants lowered their awnings; he left them as their day began.

An hour later he was riding for the sea. Eighty miles away lay the sea and Laura. She slept unwitting of the devouring wheels that brought him to her. He looked at the aqueous blue sky whitened with little clouds, and at the land wooded with pines and indefinable tokens of the marshes and bright salt.

The train drew under the boat-shed at Newport News. The terrific locomotive, as beautiful as any ship, breathed with unlaborious fatigue at the rail-head. There, by lapping water, she came to rest, like a completed destiny.

The little boat lay waiting at the dock. Within a few minutes he had left the hot murky smell of the shed and was cruising out into the blue water of the Roads. A great light wind swept over the water, making a singing noise through the tackle of the little boat, making a music and a glory in his heart. He drove along the little decks at a bounding stride, lunging past the staring people, with wild noises in his throat. The lean destroyers, the bright mad camouflage of the freighters and the transports, the lazy red whirl of a propeller, half-submerged, and the light winey sparkle of the waves fused to a single radiance and filled him with glory. He cried back into the throat of the enormous wind, and his eyes were wet.

Upon the decks of the boats, clean little figures in white moved about; under the bulging counter of a huge Frenchman young naked men were swimming. They come from France, he thought, and it is strange that they should be here.

O, the wonder, the magic and the loss! His life was like a great wave breaking in the lonely sea; his hungry shoulder found no barriers—he smote his strength at nothing, and was lost and scattered like a wrack of mist. But he believed that this supreme ecstasy which mastered him and made him drunken might some day fuse its enormous light into a single articulation. He was Phaeton with the terrible horses of the sun: he believed that his life might pulse constantly at its longest stroke, achieve an eternal summit.

The hot Virginias broiled under the fierce blue oven of the sky, but in the Roads the ships rocked in the freshening breeze of war and glory.

Eugene remained in the furnace of Norfolk for four days, until his money was gone. He watched it go without fear, with a sharp quickening of his pulses, tasting the keen pleasure of his loneliness and the unknown turnings of his life. He sensed the throbbing antennæ of the world: life purred like a hidden dynamo, with the vast excitement of ten thousand glorious threats. He might do all, dare all, become all. The far and the mighty was near him, around him, above him. There was no great bridge to span, no hard summit to win. From obscurity, hunger, loneliness, he might be lifted in a moment into power, glory, love. The transport loading at the docks might bear him war-ward, love-ward, fame-ward Wednesday night.

He walked by lapping water through the dark. He heard its green wet slap against the crusted pier-piles: he drank its strong cod scent, and watched the loading of great boats drenched in blazing light as they weltered slowly down into the water. And the night was loud with the rumble of huge cranes, the sudden loose rattle of the donkey-engines, the cries of the overseers, and the incessant rumbling trucks of stevedores within the pier.

His imperial country, for the first time, was gathering the huge thrust of her might. The air was charged with murderous exuberance, rioting and corrupt extravagance.

Through the hot streets of that town seethed the toughs, the crooks, the vagabonds of a nation—Chicago gunmen, bad niggers from Texas, Bowery bums, pale Jews with soft palms, from the shops of the city, Swedes from the Middle-West, Irish from New England, mountaineers from Tennessee and North Carolina, whores, in shoals and droves, from everywhere. For these the war was a fat enormous goose raining its golden eggs upon them. There was no thought or belief in any future. There was only the triumphant *Now*. There was no life beyond the moment. There was only an insane flux and re-flux of getting and spending.

Young men from Georgia farms came, in the evenings, from their work on piers, in camps, in shipyards, to dress up in their peacock plumage. And at night, hard and brown and lean of hand and face, they stood along the curbing in $18.00 tan leathers, $80.00 suits, and $8.00 silk shirts striped with broad alternating bands of red and blue. They were carpenters, masons, gang overseers, or said they were: they were paid ten, twelve, fourteen, eighteen dollars a day.

They shifted, veered from camp to camp, worked for a month, loafed opulently for a week, enjoying the brief bought loves of girls they met upon the ocean-beach or in a brothel.

Strapping black buck-niggers, with gorilla arms and the black paws of panthers, earned $60 a week as stevedores, and spent it on a mulatto girl in a single evening of red riot.

And more quietly, soberly, in this crowd, moved the older thriftier workmen: the true carpenters, the true masons, the true mechanics—the canny Scotch-Irish of North Carolina, the fishermen of the Virginia coast, the careful peasantry of the Middle-West, who had come to earn, to save, to profit from the war.

Everywhere amid this swarming crowd gleamed the bright raiment of blood and glory: the sailors thronged the streets in flapping blues and spotless whites—brown, tough, and clean. The marines strode by in arrogant twos, stiff as rods in the loud pomp of chevrons and striped trousers. Commanders gray and grim, hard-handed C. P. O.'s, and elegant young ensigns out of college, with something blonde and fluffy at their side, went by among the red cap-buttons of French matelots, or the swagger sea-wise port of the Englishmen.

Through this crowd, with matted uncut hair that fell into his eyes, that shot its spirals through the rents of his old green hat, that curled a thick scroll up his dirty neck, Eugene plunged with hot devouring eyes—soaked in his sweat by day, sharp and stale by night.

In this great camp of vagrant floaters he lost himself: he came home into this world from loneliness. The hunger for voyages, the hunger that haunts Americans, who are a nomad race, was half-assuaged here in this maelstrom of the war.

He lost himself in the crowd. He lost count of the days. His little store of money melted. He moved from a cheap hotel, loud at night with the noise of harlotry, to a little attic room in a lodging-house, an oven of hot pine and tarred roof; he moved from the lodging-house to a fifty-cent cot in the Y. M. C. A., where, returning night by night, he paid his fee, and slept in a room with forty snoring sailors.

Finally, his money gone, he slept, until driven out, in all-night lunch-rooms; upon the Portsmouth ferry; and over lapping water on a rotting pier.

By night he prowled about among the negroes; he listened to their rich proposed seductions; he went where the sailors went, down Church Street, where the women were. He prowled the night with young beast-lust, his thin boy-body stale with sweat, his hot eyes burning through the dark.

He grew hungry for food. His money was gone. But there was a hunger and thirst in him that could not be fed. Over the chaos of his brain hung the shadow of Laura James. Her shadow hung above the town, above all life. It had brought him here; his heart was swollen with pain and pride; he would not go to find her.

He was obsessed with the notion that he would find her in the crowd, upon the street, around the corner. He would not speak to her if he met her. He would go proudly and indifferently by. He would not see her. She would see him. She would see him at some heroic moment, just as he was receiving the love and respect of beautiful women. She would speak to him; he would not speak to her. She would be stricken; she would be beaten down; she would cry to him for love and mercy.

Thus, unclean, unkempt, clothed in rags and hunger and madness, he saw himself victorious, heroic and beautiful. He was mad with his obsession. He thought he saw Laura on the streets a dozen times a day: his heart turned rotten; he did not know what he should do or say, whether to run or remain. He brooded for hours over her address in the telephone directory; sitting by the phone, he trembled with excitement because its awful magic could be sounded at a gesture, because within a minute he could be with her, voice to voice.

He hunted out her home. She was living in an old frame house far out from the centre of the town. He stalked carefully about the neighborhood, keeping a block away from the house at all times, observing it obliquely, laterally, from front and back, with stealthy eye and a smothering thud of the heart, but never passing before it, never coming directly to it.

He was foul and dirty. The soles of his shoes wore through: his calloused feet beat against hot pavements. He stank.

At length, he tried to get work. Work there was in great abundance—but the princely wages of which he had been told were hard to find. He could not swear he was a carpenter. a mason. He was a dirty boy, and looked it. He was afraid. He went to the Navy Yard at Portsmouth, the Naval Base at Norfolk, the Bush Terminal—everywhere there was work, abundant work—hard labor that paid four dollars a day. This he would gladly have taken; but he found that he could not have his wages until after the second week, and that one week's pay would be withheld to tide him over in illness, trouble, or departure.

And he had no money left.

He went to a Jew and pawned the watch Eliza had given him upon his birthday. He got five dollars on it. Then he went by boat once more to Newport News, and by trolley up the coast to Hampton. He had heard, in the thronging rumor of Norfolk, that there was work upon the flying field, and that the worker was fed and housed upon the field, at company expense.

In the little employment shack at the end of the long bridge that led across into the field, he was signed on as a laborer and searched by the sentry, who made him open his valise. Then he labored across the bridge, kneeing his heavy bag, which bulged with his soiled and disorderly belongings, before him.

He staggered at length into the rude company office and sought out the superintendent, a man in the thirties, shaven, pale, weary, who wore a blue eyeshade, armbands, and talked with a limp cigarette plastered on his lip.

Eugene thrust out his employment slip in shaking fingers. The man looked briefly at it.

"College boy, aren't you, son?" he said, glancing at Eugene.

"Yes, sir," said Eugene.

"Did you ever do day labor before?" said the man.

"No, sir," said Eugene.

"How old are you, son?" the man asked.

Eugene was silent for a moment. "I'm—nineteen," he said at length, wondering, since he had lied, why he had not had courage to say twenty.

The superintendent grinned wearily.

"It's hard work, son," the man said. "You'll be among the wops and the Swedes and the hunkies. You'll live in the same bunkhouse, you'll eat with them. They don't smell nice, son."

"I have no money," said Eugene. "I'll work hard. I won't get sick. Give me the job. Please!"

"No," said the man. "No, I won't do that."

Eugene turned blindly away.

"I tell you what I'll do," said the superintendent. "I'll give you a job as a checker. You'll be with the office force. That's where you belong. You'll live with them in their own bunkhouse. They're nice fellows," he said elegantly, "college fellows, like yourself."

"Thank you," said Eugene, clenching his fingers, with husky emotion. "Thank you."

"The checker we've got is quitting," said the superintendent. "You'll go to the stables with him in the morning to get your horse."

"H-h-h-horse?" said Eugene.

"You'll have a horse," said the superintendent, "to ride around on."

With strong bowel-excitement Eugene began to think of the horse, with joy, with fear. He turned to go. He could not bear to talk of money.

"H-h-how much—?" he finally croaked, feeling that he must. Business.

"I'll give you $80 a month to begin with," said the manager with a touch of magnificence. "If you make good, I'll give you a hundred."

"And my keep?" whispered Eugene.

"Sure!" said the manager. "That's thrown in."

Eugene reeled away with his valise, and with a head full of exploding rockets.

These months, although filled with terror and hunger, must be passed in rapid summary, with bare mention of the men and actions that a lost boy knew. They belong to a story of escape and wandering—valuable here to indicate the initiation to the voyage this life will make. They are a prelude to exile, and into their nightmare chaos no other purpose may be read than the blind groping of a soul toward freedom and isolation.

Eugene worked upon the Flying Field for a month. Three times a day he rode around the field to check the numbers of two dozen gangs who were engaged in the work of grading, levelling, blasting from the spongy earth the ragged stumps of trees and filling interminably, ceaselessly, like the weary and fruitless labor of a nightmare, the marshy earth-craters, which drank their shovelled toil without end. The gangs were of all races and conditions: Portugee niggers, ebony-black, faithful and childlike, who welcomed him with great toothy grins, each pointing to his big white pin, on which was printed his number, crying out in strange outlandish voices, "feefety-nine, nine-net-ty seex," and so on; Bowery bums, in greasy serge and battered derbies, toying distastefully with pick-handles that shredded their dirty uncalloused palms—their hard evil faces, with their smudge of beard, were like things corrupt, green-yellow, that grow under barrels. And there were also drawling fishermen from the Virginia coast, huge gorilla niggers from Georgia and the lower South, Italians, Swedes, Irishmen—part of the huge compost of America.

He came to know them and their overseers—tough reckless men, gray-haired and lustful, full of swift action and coarse humor.

Stuck like a jigging doll upon the horse, whom he feared, he rode, staring into heaven, sometimes almost unconscious of the great engine expanding and contracting below him with a brown sensual rhythm. The bird-men filled the blue Virginia weather with the great drone of the Liberties.

At length, hungry again for the ships and faces, he left his work and spent his earnings in a week of gaudy riot in Norfolk and on the Virginia beaches. Almost penniless again, with only the savage kaleidoscope of a thousand streets, a million lights, the blazing confusion and the strident noise of carnival, he returned to Newport News in search of employment, accompanied by another youth from Altamont, likewise a thriftless adventurer in war-work, whom he had found upon the beach. This worthy, whose name was Sinker Jordan, was three years older than Eugene. He was a handsome reckless boy, small in stature, and limping from an injury he had received in a football game. His character was weak and volatile—he hated effort, and was obstinate only in cursing ill-fortune.

The two young men had a few dollars between them. They pooled their resources, and, with wild optimism, purchased from a pawnbroker in Newport News the rudiments of carpenter's equipment—hammers, saws, and T-squares. They went inland fifteen or twenty miles to a dreary government camp sweltering in the Virginia pines. They were refused employment here and in black dejection returned in the afternoon to the town they had left so hopefully in the morning. Before sundown they had secured employment in the Shipbuilding Yards, but they had been discharged five minutes after they reported for work, when they confessed to a grinning foreman in a room full of wood-shavings and quietly slatting belts, that they had no knowledge of the intensely special carpentry of ship's carving. Nor (they might have added) of any other.

They were quite moneyless now, and once on the street again, Sinker Jordan had hurled upon the pavement the fatal tools, cursing savagely the folly that threatened now to keep them hungry. Eugene picked the tools up, and took them back to the imperturbable Uncle, who repurchased them for only a few dollars less than the sum they had paid him in the morning.

Thus the day. They found a lodging in a dingy house where, as an appropriate climax to his folly, Sinker Jordan surrendered their remaining capital into the greedy palm of the landlady—and a real lady too, she admitted. But, having previously eaten, they had all the hope of a full belly and their youth—they slept, Sinker without care and without effort.

Eugene was early up at dawn, and after futile efforts to waken the luxuriously somnolent Sinker, he was off to the dingy yellow piers along the waterfront, which were stored with munitions for the war. After a morning tramping up and down the dusty road outside the guarded enclosures, he had obtained employment for himself and Sinker from the chief checker, a nervous ugly man, swollen with petty tyranny. He had gimlet eyes, glittering below spectacles, and hard muscular jaws that writhed constantly.

Eugene went to work at seven the next morning—Sinker, a day or two later, only when his last small coin had vanished. Eugene screwed up his pride and borrowed a few dollars from one of the other checkers. On this he and Sinker lived meagrely until pay-day—which was only a few days off. This money slipped quickly through their careless fingers. Down to a few coins again, with the next pay-day almost two weeks off, Sinker gambled at dice with the checkers, behind the great fortress of sacked oats upon the pier—lost, won, lost, rose penniless and cursing God. Eugene knelt beside the checkers, with his last half-dollar in his palm, heedless of Sinker's bitter taunt. He had never thrown dice before: naturally, he won—$8.50. He rose exultantly from their profane surprise, and took Sinker to dinner at the best hotel.

A day or two later, he went behind the oats again, gambled with his last dollar—and lost.

He began to starve. Day crawled into weary day. The fierce eye of July beat down upon the pier with a straight insufferable glare. The boats and trains slid in and out, crammed to the teeth with munitions—with food for the soldiers. The hot grainy air on the pier swam before his eyes speckled with dancing patches, and he made weary tallies on a sheet as the big black stevedores swarmed past him with their trucks. Sinker Jordan cadged small sums from the other checkers, and lived miserably on bottled pop and cheese at a little grocery across the road from the pier. Eugene was unable to beg or borrow. Partly from pride, but more from the powerful brooding inertia of his temper, which more and more was governing his will to act, he found himself unable to speak. Each day he said: "I shall speak to one of them to-day. I shall say that I must eat, and that I have no money." But when he tried to speak he could not.

As they grew more efficient in their work they were called back, after the day's end, for work at night. This extra work, with its time-and-a-half pay, he would otherwise have been glad to get, but stumbling from exhaustion, the command to return was horrible. For several days now he had not been home to the dingy little room which he shared with Sinker Jordan. At the end of his day's work, he would climb to a little oasis in the enormous wall of sacked oats and sink into exhausted sleep, with the rattling of cranes and winches, the steady rumble of the trucks, and the remote baying of boats anchored in the stream—mixing in a strange faint symphony in his ears.

And he lay there, with the fading glimmer of the world about him, as the war mounted to its climax of blood and passion during that terrible month. He lay there, like his own ghost, thinking with pain, with grief, of all the million towns and faces he had not known. He was the atom for which all life had been aplot—Cæsar had died and a nameless wife of Babylon, and somewhere here, upon this marvellous dying flesh, this myriad brain, their mark, their spirit, rested.

And he thought of the strange lost faces he had known, the lonely figures of his family, damned in chaos, each chained to a destiny of ruin and loss—Gant, a fallen Titan, staring down enormous vistas of the Past, indifferent to the world about him; Eliza, beetle-wise, involved in blind accretions; Helen, childless, pathless, furious—a great wave breaking on the barren waste; and finally, Ben—the ghost, the stranger, prowling at this moment in another town, going up and down the thousand streets of life, and finding no doors.

But the next day, on the pier, Eugene was weaker than ever. He sat sprawled upon a throne of plump oat sacks, with blurred eyes watching the loading of the bags at the spout, marking raggedly his tally upon the sheet as the stevedores plunged in and out. The terrible heat steamed through the grainy pollen of the air: he moved each limb with forethought, picking it up and placing it as if it were a detached object.

At the end of the day he was asked to return for night-work. He listened, swaying on his feet, to the far-sounding voice of the chief checker.

The supper hour came, upon the heated pier, with the sudden noise of silence. There were small completed noises up and down the enormous shed: a faint drumming of footfalls of workers walking toward the entrance, a slap of water at the ship's hull, a noise from the bridge.

Eugene went behind the oat pile and climbed blindly up until he reached his little fortress at the top. The world ebbed from his fading sense: all sound grew fainter, more far. Presently, he thought, when I have rested here, I shall get up and go down to work. It has been a hot day. I am tired. But when he tried to move he could not. His will struggled against the imponderable lead of his flesh, stirring helplessly like a man in a cage. He thought quietly, with relief, with tranquil joy. They will not find me here. I cannot move. It is over. If I had thought of this long ago, I would have been afraid. But I'm not, now. Here—upon the oat pile—doing my bit—for Democracy. I'll begin to stink. They'll find me then.

Life glimmered away out of his weary eyes. He lay, half-conscious, sprawled upon the oats. He thought of the horse.

In this way the young checker, who had loaned him money, found him. The checker knelt above him, supporting Eugene's head with one hand, and putting a bottle of raw hard liquor to his mouth with the other. When the boy had revived somewhat, the checker helped him to descend the pile and walked slowly with him up the long wooden platform of the pier.

They went across the road to a little grocery-store. The checker ordered a bottle of milk, a box of crackers, and a big block of cheese. As Eugene ate, the tears began to flow down his grimy face, dredging dirty gullies on his skin. They were tears of hunger and weakness: he could not restrain them.

The checker stood over him watchfully, with a kindly troubled stare. He was a young man with a lantern jaw, and a thin dish face: he wore scholarly spectacles, and smoked a pipe reflectively.

"Why didn't you tell me, boy? I'd have let you have the money," he said.

"I—don't—know," said Eugene, between bites of cheese. "Couldn't."

With the checker's loan of five dollars he and Sinker Jordan lived until pay-day. Then, after dining together on four pounds of steak, Sinker Jordan departed for Altamont and the enjoyment of an inheritance which had fallen due a few days before, on his twenty-first birthday. Eugene stayed on.

He was like a man who had died, and had been re-born. All that had gone before lived in a ghostly world. He thought of his family, of Ben, of Laura James, as if they were ghosts. The world itself turned ghost. All through that month of August, while the war marched to its ending, he looked upon its dying carnival. Nothing seemed any longer hard and hot and raw and new. Everything was old. Everything was dying. A vast aerial music, forever far-faint, like the language of his forgotten world, sounded in his ears. He had known birth. He had known pain and love. He had known hunger. Almost he had known death.

At night, when he was not called back for work he rode out by trolley to one of the Virginia beaches. But the only sound that was real, that was near and present, was the sound in his heart, in his brain, of the everlasting sea. He turned his face toward it: behind him, the cheap million lights of the concessionaires, the clatter, the racket, the confetti, the shrill blare of the saxophones, all the harsh joyless noise of his country, was softened, was made sad, far, and phantom. The wheeling merry-go-round, the blaring dance-orchestra, played *K-K-K-Katy, Beautiful Katy, Poor Little Buttercup,* and *Just a Baby's Prayer at Twilight.*

And that cheap music turned elfin and lovely: it was mixed into magic—it became a part of the romantic and lovely Virginias, of the surge of the sea, as it rolled in from the eternal dark, across the beach, and of his own magnificent sorrow—his triumphant loneliness after pain and love and hunger.

His face was thin and bright as a blade, below the great curling shock of his hair; his body as lean as a starved cat's; his eyes bright and fierce.

O sea! (he thought) I am the hill-born, the prison-pent, the ghost, the stranger, and I walk here at your side. O sea, I am lonely like you, I am strange and far like you, I am sorrowful like you; my brain, my heart, my life, like yours, have touched strange shores. You are like a woman lying below yourself on the coral floor. You are an immense and fruitful woman with vast thighs and a great thick mop of curling woman's hair floating like green moss above your belly. And you will bring me to the happy land, you will wash me to glory in bright ships.

There by the sea of the dark Virginias, he thought of the forgotten faces, of all the million patterns of himself, the ghost of his lost flesh. The child that heard Swain's cow, the lost boy in the Ozarks, the carrier of news among the blacks, and the boy who went in by the lattice with Jim Trivett. And the waitress, and Ben, and Laura? Dead, too? Where? How? Why? Why has the web been woven? Why do we die so many deaths? How came I here beside the sea? O lost, O far and lonely, where?

Sometimes, as he walked back among the dancers, a scarecrow in flapping rags, he looked and saw himself among them. He seemed to be two people: he constantly saw himself with dark bent face sitting upon the top rail of a fence, watching himself go by with a bright herd of young people. He saw himself among the crowds, several inches shorter than he was, fitting comfortably into a world where everything was big enough for him.

And while he stared and saw himself beloved and admitted, he heard them laugh: he felt suddenly the hard white ring of their faces about him, and he plunged away, with cursing mouth.

O my sweet bitches! My fine cheap sluts! You little crawling itch of twiddlers: you will snigger at me! At me! At me! (He beat his hands against his ribs.) You will mock at me, with your drug-store pimps, your Jazz-bo apes, your gorilla gobs, you cute little side-porch chippies! What do you understand? The lust of a goat, the stink of your kind—that does for you, my girls. And yet you laugh at me! Ah, but I'll tell you why you laugh: you are afraid of me because I am not like the others. You hate me because I do not belong. You see I am finer and greater than any one you know: you cannot reach me and you hate me. That's it! The ethereal (yet manly) beauty of my features, my boyish charm (for I am Just a Boy) blended with the tragic wisdom of my eyes (as old as life and filled with the brooding tragedy of the ages), the sensitive and delicate flicker of my mouth, and my marvellous dark face blooming inward on strange loveliness like a flower—all this you want to kill because you cannot touch it. Ah me! (Thinking of his strange beauty, his eyes grew moist with love and glory, and he was forced to blow his nose.) Ah, but She will know. The love of a lady. Proudly, with misty eyes, he saw her standing beside him against the rabble: her elegant small head, wound with a bracelet of bright hair, against his shoulder, and with two splendid pearls in her ears. Dearest! Dearest! We stand here on a star. We are beyond them now. Behold! They shrink, they fade, they pass—victorious, enduring, marvellous love, my dearest, we remain.

Brooding thus on the vision of his own beauty, stirred by his own heroic music, with misty eyes, he would pass over into the forbidden settlement, with its vigilant patrols of naval and military police on the watch for their own, and prowl softly down a dark little street to a dingy frame house with drawn blinds, where dwelt a love that for three dollars could be bought and clothed with his own fable. Her name was Stella Blake. She was never in a hurry.

With her lived a young corn-haired girl of twenty years whose family lived in Pulpit Hill. Sometimes he went to see her.

Twice a week the troops went through. They stood densely in brown and weary thousands on the pier while a council of officers, tabled at the gangways, went through their clearance papers. Then, each below the sweating torture of his pack, they were filed from the hot furnace of the pier into the hotter prison of the ship. The great ships, with their motley jagged patches of deception, waited in the stream: they slid in and out in unending squadrons.

Sometimes the troops were black—labor regiments from Georgia and Alabama; big gorilla bucks from Texas. They gleamed with sweat and huge rich laughter: they were obedient as children and called their cursing officers "boss."

"And don't you call me 'boss' again, you bastards!" screamed a young Tennessee lieutenant, who had gone slowly insane during the moving, as he nursed his charges through hell. They grinned at him cheerfully, with affection, like good obedient children, as he stamped, raving, up and down the pier. From time to time they goaded him into a new frenzy with complaints about lost hats, bayonets, small arms, and papers. Somehow he found things for them; somehow he cursed his way through, keeping them in order. They grinned affectionately, therefore, and called him boss.

"And what in Jesus' name have you done now?" he yelled, as a huge black sergeant with several enlisted men, who had gathered at the examiner's table, burst suddenly into loud roars of grief.

The fiery lieutenant rushed at the table, cursing.

The sergeant and several enlisted men, all Texas darkies, had come away from camp without a clean bill of health: they were venereals and had not been cured.

"Boss," blubbered the big black sergeant, "we wants to go to France. We don't want to git lef' in dis Gawd-dam hole."

(Nor do I blame them, thought Eugene.)

"I'll kill you! So help me God, I'll kill you!" screamed the officer, hurling his trim cap upon the ground and stamping upon it. But, a moment later, with a medical officer he was leading them away for examination behind the great wall of sacked oats. Five minutes later they emerged. The negroes were cavorting with joy: they pressed around their fierce commander, seizing and kissing his hand, fawning upon him, adoring him.

"You see," said the dish-faced checker, while he and Eugene watched, "that's what it takes to hold a crowd of niggers. You can't be nice to 'em. They'd do anything for that guy."

"He would for them," said Eugene.

These negroes, he thought, who came from Africa, were sold at the block in Louisiana, and live in Texas, are now on their way to France.

Mr. Finch, the chief checker with the ugly slit eyes, approached Eugene with a smile of false warmth. His gray jaws worked.

"I've got a job for you, Gant," he said. "Double-time pay. I want you to get in on some of the easy money."

"What is it?" said Eugene.

"They're loading this ship with big stuff," said Mr. Finch. "They're taking her out into the stream to get it on. I want you to go out with her. They'll take you off in a tug to-night."

The dish-faced checker, when jubilantly he told him of his appointment, said:

"They asked me to go, but I wouldn't."

"Why not?" said Eugene.

"I don't want the money bad enough. They're loading her with T. N. T. and nitro-glycerin. The niggers play baseball with those cases. If they ever drop one, they'll bring you home in a bucket."

"It's all in the day's work," said Eugene dramatically.

This was danger, war. He was definitely in on it, risking his hide for Democracy. He was thrilled.

When the big freighter slid away from the pier, he stood in the bow with spread legs, darting his eyes about with fierce eagle glances. The iron decks blistered his feet through the thin soles of his shoes. He did not mind. He was the captain.

She anchored seaward down the Roads, and the great barges were nosed in by the tugs. All through the day, under a broiling sun, they loaded her from the rocking barges: her huge yellow booms swung up and down; by nightfall she rode deeply in the water, packed to her throat with shells and powder, and bearing on the hot plates of her deck 1200 grisly tons of field artillery.

Eugene stood with fierce appraising eyes, walking about the guns with a sense of authority, jotting down numbers, items pieces. From time to time he thrust a handful of moist scrap tobacco into his mouth, and chewed with an air of relish. He spat hot sizzling gobs upon the iron deck. God! thought he. This is man's work. Heave-ho, ye black devils! There's a war on! He spat.

The tug came at nightfall and took him off. He sat apart from the stevedores, trying to fancy the boat had come for him alone. The lights went twinkling up the far Virginia shores. He spat into the swirling waters.

When the trains slid in and out, the stevedores raised the wooden bridges that spanned the tracks. Foot by foot, with rhythmic pull and halt, the gangs tugged at the ropes, singing, under the direction of their leader, their song of love and labor:

"Jelly Roll! (Heh!) Je-e-elly Roll."

They were great black men, each with his kept woman. They earned fifty or sixty dollars a week.

Once or twice again, in the dying summer, Eugene went to Norfolk. He saw the sailor, but he no longer tried to see Laura. She seemed far and lost.

He had not written home all summer. He found a letter from Gant, written in his father's Gothic sprawl—a sick and feeble letter, written sorrowfully and far away. O lost! Eliza, in the rush and business of the summer trade, had added a few practical lines. Save his money. Get plenty of good food. Keep well. Be a good boy.

The boy was a lean column of brown skin and bone. He had lost over thirty pounds during the summer: he was over six foot four and weighed little more than one hundred and thirty pounds.

The sailor was shocked at his emaciation, and bullied him with blustering reproof:

"Why didn't you t-t-tell me where you were, idiot? I'd have sent you money. For G-g-god's sake! Come on and eat!" They ate.

The summer waned. When September came, Eugene quit his work and, after a luxurious day or two in Norfolk, started homeward. But, at Richmond, where there was a wait of three hours between trains, he changed his plans suddenly and went to a good hotel.

He was touched with pride and victory. In his pockets he had $130 that he had won hardily by his own toil. He had lived alone, he had known pain and hunger, he had survived. The old hunger for voyages fed at his heart. He thrilled to the glory of the secret life. The fear of the crowd, a distrust and hatred of group life, a horror of all bonds that tied him to the terrible family of the earth, called up again the vast Utopia of his loneliness. To go alone, as he had gone, into strange cities; to meet strange people and to pass again before they could know him; to wander, like his own legend, across the earth—it seemed to him there could be no better thing than that.

He thought of his own family with fear, almost with hatred. My God! Am I never to be free? he thought. What have I done to deserve this slavery? Suppose—suppose I were in China, or in Africa, or at the South Pole. I should always be afraid of his dying while I was away. (He twisted his neck as he thought of it.) And how they would rub it in to me if I were not there! Enjoying yourself in China (they would say) while your father was dying. Unnatural son! Yes, but curse them! Why should I be there? Can they not die alone? Alone! O God, is there no freedom on this earth?

With quick horror, he saw that such freedom lay a weary world away, and could be bought by such enduring courage as few men have.

He stayed in Richmond several days, living sumptuously in the splendid hotel, eating from silver dishes in the grill, and roaming pleasantly through the wide streets of the romantic old town, to which he had come once as a Freshman at Thanksgiving, when the university's team had played Virginia there. He spent three days trying to seduce a waitress in an ice-cream and candy-store: he lured her finally to a curtained booth in a chop-suey restaurant, only to have his efforts fail when the elaborate meal he had arranged for with the Chinaman aroused her distaste because it had onions in it.

Before he went home he wrote an enormous letter to Laura James at Norfolk, a pitiable and boasting letter which rose at its end to an insane crow: "I was there all summer and I never looked you up. You were not decent enough to answer my letters; I saw no reason why I should bother with you any more. Besides, the world is full of women; I got my share and more this summer."

He mailed the letter, with a sense of malevolent triumph. But the moment the iron lid of the box clanged over it, his face was contorted by shame and remorse: he lay awake, writhing as he recalled the schoolboy folly of it. She had beaten him again.

XXXIV

Eugene returned to Altamont two weeks before the term began at Pulpit Hill. The town and the nation seethed in the yeasty ferment of war. The country was turning into one huge camp. The colleges and universities were being converted into training-camps for officers. Every one was "doing his bit."

It had been a poor season for tourists. Eugene found Dixieland almost deserted, save for a glum handful of regular or semi-regular guests. Mrs. Pert was there, sweet, gentle, a trifle more fuzzy than usual. Miss Newton, a wrenny and neurotic old maid, with asthma, who had gradually become Eliza's unofficial assistant in the management of the house, was there. Miss Malone, the gaunt drug-eater with the loose gray lips, was there. Fowler, a civil engineer with blond hair and a red face, who came and departed quietly, leaving a sodden stench of corn-whiskey in his wake, was there. Gant, who had now moved definitely from the house on Woodson Street, which he had rented, to a big back room at Eliza's, was there—a little more waxen, a little more petulant, a little feebler than he had been before. And Ben was there.

He had been home for a week or two when Eugene arrived. He had been rejected again by both army and navy examining-boards, he had been rejected as unfit in the draft; he had left his work suddenly in the tobacco town and come quietly and sullenly home. He was thinner and more like old ivory than ever. He prowled softly about the house, smoking innumerable cigarettes, cursing in brief snarling fury, touched with despair and futility. His old surly scowl was gone, his old angry mutter; his soft contemptuous laugh, touched with so much hidden tenderness, had given way to a contained but savage madness.

During the brief two weeks that Eugene remained at home before departing again for Pulpit Hill, he shared with Ben a little room and sleeping-porch upstairs. And the quiet one talked —talked himself from a low fierce mutter into a howling anathema of bitterness and hate that carried his voice, high and passionate, across all the sleeping world of night and rustling autumn.

"What have you been doing to yourself, you little fool?" he began, looking at the boy's starved ribs. "You look like a scarecrow."

"I'm all right," said Eugene. "I wasn't eating for a while. But I didn't write them," he added proudly. "They thought I couldn't hold out by myself. But I did. I didn't ask for help. And I came home with my own money. See?" He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out his soiled roll of banknotes, boastfully displaying it.

"Who wants to see your lousy little money?" Ben yelled furiously. "Fool! You come back, looking like a dead man, as if you'd done something to be proud of. What've you done? What've you done except make a monkey of yourself?"

"I've paid my own way," Eugene cried resentfully, stung and wounded. "That's what I've done."

"Ah-h," said Ben, with an ugly sneer, "you little fool! That's what they've been after! Do you think you've put anything over on them? Do you? Do you think they give a damn whether you die or not, as long as you save them expense? What are you bragging about? Don't brag until you've got something out of them."

Propped on his arm, he smoked deeply, in bitter silence, for a moment. Then more quietly, he continued.

"No, 'Gene. Get it out of them any way you can. Make them give it to you. Beg it, take it, steal it—only get it somehow. If you don't, they'll let it rot. Get it, and get away from them. Go away and don't come back. To hell with them!" he yelled.

Eliza, who had come softly upstairs to put out the lights, and had been standing for a moment outside the door, rapped gently and entered. Clothed in a tattered old sweater and indefinable under-lappings, she stood for a moment with folded hands, peering in on them with a white troubled face.

"Children," she said, pursing her lips reproachfully, and shaking her head, "it's time every one was in bed. You're keeping the whole house awake with your talk."

"Ah-h," said Ben with an ugly laugh, "to hell with them."

"I'll vow, child!" she said, fretfully. "You'll break us up. Have you got that porch light on, too?" Her eyes probed about suspiciously. "What on earth do you mean by burning up all that electricity!"

"Oh, listen to this, won't you?" said Ben, jerking his head upward with a jeering laugh.

"I can't afford to pay all these bills," said Eliza angrily, with a smart shake of her head. "And you needn't think I can. I'm not going to put up with it. It's up to us all to economize."

"Oh, for God's sake!" Ben jeered. "Economize! What for? So you can give it all away to Old Man Doak for one of his lots?"

"Now, you needn't get on your high-horse," said Eliza. "You're not the one who has to pay the bills. If you did, you'd laugh out of the other side of your mouth. I don't like any such talk. You've squandered every penny you've earned because you've never known the value of a dollar."

"Ah-h!" he said. "The value of a dollar! By God, I know the value of a dollar better than you do. I've had a little something out of mine, at any rate. What have you had out of yours? I'd like to know that. What the hell's good has it ever been to any one? Will you tell me that?" he yelled.

"You may sneer all you like," said Eliza sternly, "but if it hadn't been for your papa and me accumulating a little property, you'd never have had a roof to call your own. And this is the thanks I get for all my drudgery in my old age," she said, bursting into tears. "Ingratitude! Ingratitude!"

"Ingratitude!" he sneered. "What's there to be grateful for? You don't think I'm grateful to you or the old man for anything, do you? What have you ever given me? You let me go to hell from the time I was twelve years old. No one has ever given me a damned nickel since then. Look at your kid here. You've let him run around the country like a crazy man. Did you think enough of him this summer to send him a post-card? Did you know where he was? Did you give a damn, as long as there was fifty cents to be made out of your lousy boarders?"

"Ingratitude!" she whispered huskily, with a boding shake of the head. "A day of reckoning cometh."

"Oh, for God's sake!" he said, with a contemptuous laugh. He smoked for a moment. Then he went on quietly:

"No, mama. You've done very little to make us grateful to you. The rest of us ran around wild and the kid grew up here among the dope-fiends and street-walkers. You've pinched every penny and put all you've had into real estate which has done no one any good. So don't wonder if your kids aren't grateful to you."

"Any son who will talk that way to his mother," said Eliza with rankling bitterness, "is bound to come to a bad end. Wait and see!"

"The hell you say!" he sneered. They stared at each other with hard bitter eyes. He turned away in a moment, scowling with savage annoyance, but stabbed already with fierce regret.

"All right! Go on, for heaven's sake! Leave us alone! I don't want you around!" He lit a cigarette to show his indifference. The lean white fingers trembled, and the flame went out.

"Let's stop it!" said Eugene wearily. "Let's stop it! None of us is going to change! Nothing's going to get any better. We're all going to be the same. We've said all this before. So, for God's sake, let's stop it! Mama, go to bed, please. Let's all go to bed and forget about it." He went to her, and with a strong sense of shame, kissed her.

"Well, good-night, son," said Eliza slowly, with gravity. "If I were you I'd put the light out now and turn in. Get a good night's sleep, boy. You mustn't neglect your health."

She kissed him, and went away without another glance at the older boy. He did not look at her. They were parted by hard and bitter strife.

After a moment, when she had gone, Ben said without anger:

"I've had nothing out of life. I've been a failure. I've stayed here with them until I'm done for. My lungs are going: they won't even take a chance on me for the army. They won't even give the Germans a chance to shoot at me. I've never made good at anything. By God!" he said, in a mounting blaze of passion. "What's it all about? Can you figure it out, 'Gene? Is it really so, or is somebody playing a joke on us? Maybe we're dreaming all this. Do you think so?"

"Yes," said Eugene, "I do. But I wish they'd wake us up." He was silent, brooding over his thin bare body, bent forward on the bed for a moment. "Maybe," he said slowly, "maybe—there's nothing, nobody to wake."

"To hell with it all!" said Ben. "I wish it were over."

Eugene returned to Pulpit Hill in a fever of war excitement. The university had been turned into an armed camp. Young men who were eighteen years old were being admitted into the officers' training corps. But he was not yet eighteen. His birthday was two weeks off. In vain he implored the tolerance of the examining board. What did two weeks matter? Could he get in as soon as his birthday arrived? They told him he could not. What, then, could he do? They told him that he must wait until there was another draft. How long would that be? Only two or three months, they assured him. His wilted hope revived. He chafed impatiently. All was not lost.

By Christmas, with fair luck, he might be eligible for service in khaki: by Spring, if God was good, all the proud privileges of trench-lice, mustard gas, spattered brains, punctured lungs, ripped guts, asphyxiation, mud and gangrene, might be his. Over the rim of the earth he heard the glorious stamp of the feet, the fierce sweet song of the horns. With a tender smile of love for his dear self, he saw himself wearing the eagles of a colonel on his gallant young shoulders. He saw himself as Ace Gant, the falcon of the skies, with 63 Huns to his credit by his nineteenth year. He saw himself walking up the Champs-Elysées, with a handsome powdering of gray hair above his temples, a left forearm of the finest cork, and the luscious young widow of a French marshal at his side. For the first time he saw the romantic charm of mutilation. The perfect and unblemished heroes of his childhood now seemed cheap to him—fit only to illustrate advertisements for collars and toothpaste. He longed for that subtle distinction, that air of having lived and suffered that could only be attained by a wooden leg, a rebuilt nose, or the seared scar of a bullet across his temple.

Meanwhile, he fed voraciously, and drank gallons of water in an effort to increase his poundage. He weighed himself a half-dozen times a day. He even made some effort at systematic exercise: swinging his arms, bending from his hips, and so on.

And he talked about his problem with the professors. Gravely, earnestly, he wrestled with his soul, mouthing with gusto the inspiring jargon of the crusade. For the present, said the professors, was his Place not Here? Did his Conscience tell him that he Had to go? If it did, they said gravely, they would say nothing more. But had he considered the Larger Issues?

"Is not," said the Acting Dean persuasively, "is not this your Sector? Is your own Front Line not here on the campus? Is it not here that you must Go Over The Top? Oh, I know," he went on with a smile of quiet pain, "I know it would be easier to go. I have had to fight that battle myself. But we are all part of the Army now; we are all enlisted in the Service of Liberty. We are all Mobilized for Truth. And each must Do His Bit where it will count for most."

"Yes," said Eugene, with a pale tortured face, "I know. I know it's wrong. But oh, sir,—when I think of those murderous beasts, when I think of how they have menaced All that we Hold Dear, when I think of Little Belgium, and then of My Own Mother, My Own Sister—" He turned away, clenching his hands, madly in love with himself.

"Yes, yes," said the Acting Dean gently, "for boys with a spirit like yours it's not easy."

"Oh sir, it's hard!" cried Eugene passionately. "I tell you it's hard."

"We must endure," said the Dean quietly. "We must be tempered in the fire. The Future of Mankind hangs in the balance."

Deeply stirred they stood together for a moment, drenched in the radiant beauty of their heroic souls.

Eugene was managing editor of the college paper. But, since the editor was enlisted in the corps, the entire work of publication fell to the boy. Every one was in the army. With the exception of a few dozen ratty Freshmen, a few cripples, and himself, every one, it seemed, was in the army. All of his fraternity brothers, all of his college mates, who had not previously enlisted, and many young men who had never before thought of college, were in the army. "Pap" Rheinhart, George Graves, Julius Arthur—who had experienced brief and somewhat unfortunate careers at other universities, and a host of young Altamonters who had never known a campus before, were all enlisted now in the Student's Army.

During the first days, in the confusion of the new order, Eugene saw a great deal of them. Then, as the cogs of the machine began to grind more smoothly, and the university was converted into a big army post, with its punctual monotony of drilling, eating, studying, inspection, sleeping, he found himself detached, alone, occupying a position of unique and isolated authority.

He Carried On. He Held High the Torch. He Did His Bit. He was editor, reporter, censor, factotum of the paper. He wrote the news. He wrote the editorials. He seared them with flaming words. He extolled the crusade. He was possessed of the inspiration for murder.

He came and he went as he chose. When the barracks went dark at night, he prowled the campus, contemptuous of the electric flash and the muttered apologies of the officious shavetails. He roomed in the village with a tall cadaver, a gaunt medical student with hollow cheeks and a pigeon-breast, named Heston. Three or four times a week he was driven over the rutted highway to Exeter where, in a little print shop, he drank the good warm smell of ink and steel.

Later, he prowled up the dreary main street of the town as the lights went up, ate at the Greek's, flirted with a few stray furtive women until the place went dead at ten o'clock, and came back through the dark countryside in a public-service car beside a drunken old walrus who drove like a demon, and whose name was "Soak" Young.

October began, and a season of small cold rain. The earth was a sodden reek of mud and rotten leaves. The trees dripped wearily and incessantly. His eighteenth birthday came, and he turned again, with a quivering tension, toward the war.

He got a brief sick letter from his father; a few pages, practical, concrete with her blunt pungent expression, from Eliza:

"Daisy has been here with all her tribe. She went home two days ago, leaving Caroline and Richard. They have all been down sick with the flu. We've had a siege of it here. Every one has had it, and you never know who's going to be next. It seems to get the big strong ones first. Mr. Hanby, the Methodist minister, died last week. Pneumonia set in. He was a fine healthy man in the prime of life. The doctors said he was gone from the start. Helen has been laid up for several days. Says it's her old kidney trouble. They had McGuire in Thursday night. But they can't fool me, no matter what they say. Son, I hope you will never surrender to that awful craving. It has been the curse of my life. Your papa seems to go along about the same as usual. He eats well, and gets lots of sleep. I can't notice any change in him from a year ago. He may be here long after some of the rest of us are under the sod. Ben is still here. He mopes around the house all day and complains of having no appetite. I think he needs to get to work again doing something that will take his mind off himself. There are only a few people left in the house. Mrs. Pert and Miss Newton hang on as usual. The Crosbys have gone back to Miami. If it gets much colder here I'll just pack up and go too. I guess I must be getting old. I can't stand the cold the way I could when I was young. I want you to buy yourself a good warm overcoat before the winter sets in. You must also eat plenty of good substantial food. Don't squander your money but . . ."

He heard nothing more for several weeks. Then, one drizzling evening at six o'clock, when he returned to the room that he occupied with Heston, he found a telegram. It read: "Come home at once. Ben has pneumonia. Mother."

XXXV

THERE was no train until the next day. Heston quieted him during the evening with a stiff drink of gin manufactured from alcohol taken from the medical laboratory. Eugene was silent and babbled incoherently by starts: he asked the medical student a hundred questions about the progress and action of the disease.

"If it were double pneumonia she would have said so. Doesn't it seem that way to you? Hey?" he demanded feverishly.

"I should think so," said Heston. He was a kind and quiet boy.

Eugene went to Exeter the next morning to catch the train. All through a dreary gray afternoon it pounded across the sodden State. Then, there was a change and a terrible wait of several hours at a junction. Finally, as dark came, he was being borne again toward the hills.

Within his berth he lay with hot sleepless eyes, staring out at the black mass of the earth, the bulk of the hills. Finally, in the hours after midnight, he dropped into a nervous doze. He was wakened by the clatter of the trucks as they began to enter the Altamont yards. Dazed, half-dressed, he was roused by the grinding halt, and a moment later was looking out through the curtains into the grave faces of Luke and Hugh Barton.

"Ben's very sick," said Hugh Barton.

Eugene pulled on his shoes and dropped to the floor, stuffing his collar and tie into a coat pocket.

"Let's go," he said. "I'm ready."

They went softly down the aisle, amid the long dark snores of the sleepers. As they walked through the empty station toward Hugh Barton's car, Eugene said to the sailor:

"When did you get home, Luke?"

"I came in last night," he said. "I've been here only a few hours."

It was half-past three in the morning. The ugly station settlement lay fixed and horrible, like something in a dream. His strange and sudden return to it heightened his feeling of unreality. In one of the cars lined at the station curbing, the driver lay huddled below his blanket. In the Greek's lunch-room a man sat sprawled face downward on the counter. The lights were dull and weary: a few burned with slow lust in the cheap station-hotels.

Hugh Barton, who had always been a cautious driver, shot away with a savage grinding of gears. They roared townward through the rickety slums at fifty miles an hour.

"I'm afraid B-B-B-Ben is one sick boy," Luke began.

"How did it happen?" Eugene asked. "Tell me."

He had taken influenza, they told Eugene, from one of Daisy's children. He had moped about, ill and feverish, for a day or two, without going to bed.

"In that G-g-g-god-dam cold barn," Luke burst out. "If that boy dies it's because he c-c-c-couldn't keep warm."

"Never mind about that now," Eugene cried irritably, "go on."

Finally he had gone to bed, and Mrs. Pert had nursed him for a day or two.

"She was the only one who d-d-d-did a damn thing for him," said the sailor. Eliza, at length, had called in Cardiac.

"The d-d-damned old quack," Luke stuttered.

"Never mind! Never mind!" Eugene yelled. "Why dig it up now? Get on with it!"

After a day or two, he had grown apparently convalescent, and Cardiac told him he might get up if he liked. He got up and moped about the house for a day, in a cursing rage, but the next day he lay a-bed, with a high fever. Coker at length had been called in, two days before——

"That's what they should have done at the start," growled Hugh Barton over his wheel.

"Never mind!" screamed Eugene. "Get on with it."

And Ben had been desperately ill, with pneumonia in both lungs, for over a day. The sad prophetic story, a brief and terrible summary of the waste, the tardiness, and the ruin of their lives, silenced them for a moment with its inexorable sense of tragedy. They had nothing to say.

The powerful car roared up into the chill dead Square. The feeling of unreality grew upon the boy. He sought for his life, for the bright lost years, in this mean cramped huddle of brick and stone. Ben and I, here by the City Hall, the Bank, the grocery-store (he thought). Why here? In Gath or Ispahan. In Corinth or Byzantium. Not here. It is not real.

A moment later, the big car sloped to a halt at the curb, in front of Dixieland. A light burned dimly in the hall, evoking for him chill memories of damp and gloom. A warmer light burned in the parlor, painting the lowered shade of the tall window a warm and mellow orange.

"Ben's in that room upstairs," Luke whispered, "where the light is."

Eugene looked up with cold dry lips to the bleak front room upstairs, with its ugly Victorian bay-window. It was next to the sleeping-porch where, but three weeks before, Ben had hurled into the darkness his savage curse at life. The light in the sick-room burned grayly, bringing to him its grim vision of struggle and naked terror.

The three men went softly up the walk and entered the house. There was a faint clatter from the kitchen, and voices.

"Papa's in here," said Luke.

Eugene entered the parlor and found Gant seated alone before a bright coal-fire. He looked up dully and vaguely as his son entered.

"Hello, papa," said Eugene, going to him.

"Hello, son," said Gant. He kissed the boy with his bristling cropped mustache. His thin lip began to tremble petulantly.

"Have you heard about your brother?" he snuffled. "To think that this should be put upon me, old and sick as I am. O Jesus, it's fearful——"

Helen came in from the kitchen.

"Hello, Slats," she said, heartily embracing him. "How are you, honey? He's grown four inches more since he went away," she jeered, sniggering. "Well, 'Gene, cheer up! Don't look so blue. While there's life there's hope. He's not gone yet, you know." She burst into tears, hoarse, unstrung, hysterical.

"To think that this must come upon me," Gant sniffled, responding mechanically to her grief, as he rocked back and forth on his cane and stared into the fire. "O boo-hoo-hoo! What have I done that God should——"

"You shut up!" she cried, turning upon him in a blaze of fury. "Shut your mouth this minute. I don't want to hear any more from you! I've given my life to you! Everything's been done for you, and you'll be here when we're all gone. You're not the one who's sick." Her feeling toward him had, for the moment, gone rancorous and bitter.

"Where's mama?" Eugene asked.

"She's back in the kitchen," Helen said. "I'd go back and say hello before you see Ben if I were you." In a low brooding tone, she continued: "Well, forget about it. It can't be helped now."

He found Eliza busy over several bright bubbling pots of water on the gas-stove. She bustled awkwardly about, and looked surprised and confused when she saw him.

"Why, what on earth, boy! When'd you get in?"

He embraced her. But beneath her matter-of-factness, he saw the terror in her heart: her dull black eyes glinted with bright knives of fear.

"How's Ben, mama?" he asked quietly.

"Why-y," she pursed her lips reflectively, "I was just saying to Doctor Coker before you came in. 'Look here,' I said. 'I tell you what, I don't believe he's half as bad off as he looks. Now, if only we can hold on till morning, I believe there's going to be a change for the better.'"

"Mama, in heaven's name!" Helen burst out furiously. "How can you bear to talk like that? Don't you know that Ben's condition is critical? Are you never going to wake up?"

Her voice had its old cracked note of hysteria.

"Now, I tell you, son," said Eliza, with a white tremulous smile, "when you go in there to see him, don't make out as if you knew he was sick. If I were you, I'd make a big joke of it all. I'd laugh just as big as you please and say, 'See here, I thought I was coming to see a sick man. Why, pshaw!' (I'd say) 'there's nothing wrong with you. Half of it's only imagination!'"

"O mama! for Christ's sake!" said Eugene frantically. "For Christ's sake!"

He turned away, sick at heart, and caught at his throat with his fingers.

Then he went softly upstairs with Luke and Helen, approaching the sick-room with a shrivelled heart and limbs which had gone cold and bloodless. They paused for a moment, whispering, before he entered. The wretched conspiracy in the face of death filled him with horror.

"N-n-now, I wouldn't stay but a m-m-m-minute," whispered Luke. "It m-m-might make him nervous."

Eugene, bracing himself, followed Helen blindly into the room.

"Look who's come to see you," her voice came heartily. "It's Highpockets."

For a moment Eugene could see nothing, for dizziness and fear. Then, in the gray shaded light of the room, he descried Bessie Gant, the nurse, and the long yellow skull's-head of Coker, smiling wearily at him, with big stained teeth, over a long chewed cigar. Then, under the terrible light which fell directly and brutally upon the bed alone, he saw Ben. And in that moment of searing recognition he saw, what they had all seen, that Ben was dying.

Ben's long thin body lay three-quarters covered by the bedding; its gaunt outline was bitterly twisted below the covers, in an attitude of struggle and torture. It seemed not to belong to him, it was somehow distorted and detached as if it belonged to a beheaded criminal. And the sallow yellow of his face had turned gray: out of this granite tint of death, lit by two red flags of fever, the stiff black furze of a three-day beard was growing. The beard was somehow horrible; it recalled the corrupt vitality of hair, which can grow from a rotting corpse. And Ben's thin lips were lifted, in a constant grimace of torture and strangulation, above his white somehow dead-looking teeth, as inch by inch he gasped a thread of air into his lungs.

And the sound of this gasping—loud, hoarse, rapid, unbelievable, filling the room, and orchestrating every moment in it—gave to the scene its final note of horror.

Ben lay upon the bed below them, drenched in light, like some enormous insect on a naturalist's table, fighting, while they looked at him, to save with his poor wasted body the life that no one could save for him. It was monstrous, brutal.

As Eugene approached, Ben's fear-bright eyes rested upon the younger brother for the first time and bodilessly, without support, he lifted his tortured lungs from the pillow, seizing the boy's wrists fiercely in the hot white circle of his hands, and gasping in strong terror like a child: "Why have you come? Why have you come home, 'Gene?"

The boy stood white and dumb for a moment, while swarming pity and horror rose in him.

"They gave us a vacation, Ben," he said presently. "They had to close down on account of the flu."

Then he turned away suddenly into the black murk, sick with his poor lie, and unable longer to face the fear in Ben's gray eyes.

"All right, 'Gene," said Bessie Gant, with an air of authority. "Get out of here—you and Helen both. I've got one crazy Gant to look after already. I don't want two more in here." She spoke harshly, with an unpleasant laugh.

She was a thin woman of thirty-eight years, the wife of Gant's nephew, Gilbert. She was of mountain stock: she was coarse, hard, and vulgar, with little pity in her, and a cold lust for the miseries of sickness and death. These inhumanities she cloaked with her professionalism, saying:

"If I gave way to my feelings, where would the patient be?"

When they got out into the hall again, Eugene said angrily to Helen:

"Why have you got that death's-head here? How can he get well, with her around? I don't like her!"

"Say what you like—she's a good nurse." Then, in a low voice, she said: "What do you think?"

He turned away, with a convulsive gesture. She burst into tears, and seized his hand.

Luke was teetering about restlessly, breathing stertorously and smoking a cigarette, and Eliza, working her lips, stood with an attentive ear cocked to the door of the sick-room. She was holding a useless kettle of hot water.

"Huh? Hah? What say?" asked Eliza, before any one had said anything. "How is he?" Her eyes darted about at them.

"Get away! Get away! Get away!" Eugene muttered savagely. His voice rose. "Can't you get away?"

He was infuriated by the sailor's loud nervous breathing, his large awkward feet. He was angered still more by Eliza's useless kettle, her futile hovering, her "huh?" and "hah?"

"Can't you see he's fighting for his breath? Do you want to strangle him? It's messy! Messy! Do you hear?" His voice rose again.

The ugliness and discomfort of the death choked him; and the swarming family, whispering outside the door, pottering uselessly around, feeding with its terrible hunger for death on Ben's strangulation, made him mad with alternate fits of rage and pity.

Indecisively, after a moment, they went downstairs, still listening for sounds in the sick-room.

"Well, I tell you," Eliza began hopefully. "I have a feeling, I don't know what you'd call it—" She looked about awkwardly and found herself deserted. Then she went back to her boiling pots and pans.

Helen, with contorted face, drew him aside, and spoke to him in whispered hysteria, in the front hall.

"Did you see that sweater she's wearing? Did you see it? It's filthy!" Her voice sank to a brooding whisper. "Did you know that he can't bear to look at her? She came into the room yesterday, and he grew perfectly sick. He turned his head away and said 'O Helen, for God's sake, take her out of here.' You hear that, don't you? Do you hear? He can't stand to have her come near him. He doesn't want her in the room."

"Stop! Stop! For God's sake, stop!" Eugene said, clawing at his throat.

The girl was for the moment insane with hatred and hysteria.

"It may be a terrible thing to say, but if he dies I shall hate her. Do you think I can forget the way she's acted? Do you?" Her voice rose almost to a scream. "She's let him die here before her very eyes. Why, only day before yesterday, when his temperature was 104, she was talking to Old Doctor Doak about a lot. Did you know that?"

"Forget about it!" he said frantically. "She'll always be like that! It's not her fault. Can't you see that? O God, how horrible! How horrible!"

"Poor old mama!" said Helen, beginning to weep. "She'll never get over this. She's scared to death! Did you see her eyes? She knows, of course she knows!"

Then suddenly, with mad brooding face, she said: "Sometimes I think I hate her! I really think I hate her." She plucked at her large chin, absently. "Well, we mustn't talk like this," she said. "It's not right. Cheer up. We're all tired and nervous. I believe he's going to get all right yet."

Day came gray and chill, with a drear reek of murk and fog. Eliza bustled about eagerly, pathetically busy, preparing breakfast. Once she hurried awkwardly upstairs with a kettle of water, and stood for a second at the door as Bessie Gant opened it, peering in at the terrible bed, with her white puckered face. Bessie Gant blocked her further entrance, and closed the door rudely. Eliza went away making flustered apologies.

For, what the girl had said was true, and Eliza knew it. She was not wanted in the sick-room; the dying boy did not want to see her. She had seen him turn his head wearily away when she had gone in. Behind her white face dwelt this horror, but she made no confession, no complaint. She bustled around doing useless things with an eager matter-of-factness. And Eugene, choked with exasperation at one moment, because of her heavy optimism, was blind with pity the next when he saw the terrible fear and pain in her dull black eyes. He rushed toward her suddenly, as she stood above the hot stove, and seized her rough worn hand, kissing it and babbling helplessly.

"O mama! Mama! It's all right! It's all right! It's all right."

And Eliza, stripped suddenly of her pretenses, clung to him, burying her white face in his coat sleeve, weeping bitterly, helplessly, grievously, for the sad waste of the irrevocable years—the immortal hours of love that might never be relived, the great evil of forgetfulness and indifference that could never be righted now. Like a child she was grateful for his caress, and his heart twisted in him like a wild and broken thing, and he kept mumbling:

"It's all right! It's all right! It's all right!"—knowing that it was not, could never be, all right.

"If I had known. Child, if I had known," she wept, as she had wept long before at Grover's death.

"Brace up!" he said. "He'll pull through yet. The worst is over."

"Well, I tell you," said Eliza, drying her eyes at once, "I believe it is. I believe he passed the turning-point last night. I was saying to Bessie——"

The light grew. Day came, bringing hope. They sat down to breakfast in the kitchen, drawing encouragement from every scrap of cheer doctor or nurse would give them. Coker departed, non-committally optimistic. Bessie Gant came down to breakfast and was professionally encouraging.

"If I can keep his damn family out of the room, he may have some chance of getting well."

They laughed hysterically, gratefully, pleased with the woman's abuse.

"How is he this morning?" said Eliza. "Do you notice any improvement?"

"His temperature is lower, if that's what you mean."

They knew that a lower temperature in the morning was a fact of no great significance, but they took nourishment from it: their diseased emotion fed upon it—they had soared in a moment to a peak of hopefulness.

"And he's got a good heart," said Bessie Gant. "If that holds out, and he keeps fighting, he'll pull through."

"D-d-don't worry about his f-f-fighting," said Luke, in a rush of eulogy. "That b-b-boy'll fight as long as he's g-g-got a breath left in him."

"Why, yes," Eliza began, "I remember when he was a child of seven—I know I was standing on the porch one day—the reason I remember is Old Mr. Buckner had just come by with some butter and eggs your papa had——"

"O my God!" groaned Helen, with a loose grin. "Now we'll get it."

"Whah—whah!" Luke chortled crazily, prodding Eliza in the ribs.

"I'll vow, boy!" said Eliza angrily. "You act like an idiot. I'd be ashamed!"

"Whah—whah—whah!"

Helen sniggered, nudging Eugene.

"Isn't he crazy, though? Tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh-tuh." Then, with wet eyes, she drew Eugene roughly into her big bony embrace.

"Poor old 'Gene. You always got on together, didn't you? You'll feel it more than any of us."

"He's not b-b-buried yet," Luke cried heartily. "That boy may be here when the rest of us are pushing d-d-daisies."

"Where's Mrs. Pert?" said Eugene. "Is she in the house?"

A strained and bitter silence fell upon them.

"I ordered her out," said Eliza grimly, after a moment. "I told her exactly what she was—a whore." She spoke with the old stern judiciousness, but in a moment her face began to work and she burst into tears. "If it hadn't been for that woman I believe he'd be well and strong to-day. I'll vow I do!"

"Mama, in heaven's name!" Helen burst out furiously. "How dare you say a thing like that? She was the only friend he had: when he was taken sick she nursed him hand and foot. Why, the idea! The idea!" she panted in her indignation. "If it hadn't been for Mrs. Pert he'd have been dead by now. Nobody else did anything for him. You were willing enough, I notice, to keep her here and take her money until he got sick. No, sir!" she declared with emphasis. "Personally, I like her. I'm not going to cut her now."

"It's a d-d-d-damn shame!" said Luke, staunch to his goddess. "If it hadn't been for Mrs. P-P-P-Pert and you, Ben would be S. O. L. Nobody else around here gave a damn. If he d-d-d-dies, it's because he didn't get the proper care when it would have done him some good. There's always been too d-d-damn much thought of saving a nickel, and too d-d-damn little about flesh and blood!"

"Well, forget about it!" said Helen wearily. "There's one thing sure: I've done everything I could. I haven't been to bed for two days. Whatever happens, I'll have no regrets on that score." Her voice was filled with a brooding ugly satisfaction.

"I know you haven't! I know that!" The sailor turned to Eugene in his excitement, gesticulating. "That g-g-girl's worked her fingers to the bone. If it hadn't been for her—" His eyes got wet; he turned his head away and blew his nose.

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Eugene yelled, springing up from the table. "Stop it, won't you! Let's wait till later."

In this way, the terrible hours of the morning lengthened out, while they spent themselves trying to escape from the tragic net of frustration and loss in which they were caught. Their spirits soared to brief moments of insane joy and exultancy, and plunged into black pits of despair and hysteria. Eliza alone seemed consistently hopeful. Trembling with exacerbated nerves, the sailor and Eugene paced the lower hall, smoking incessant cigarettes, bristling as they approached each other, ironically polite when their bodies touched. Gant dozed in the parlor or in his own room, waking and sleeping by starts, moaning petulantly, detached, vaguely aware only of the meaning of events, and resentful because of the sudden indifference to him. Helen went in and out of the sick-room constantly, dominating the dying boy by the power of her vitality, infusing him with moments of hope and confidence. But when she came out, her hearty cheerfulness was supplanted by the strained blur of hysteria; she wept, laughed, brooded, loved, and hated by turns.

Eliza went only once into the room. She intruded with a hot-water bag, timidly, awkwardly, like a child, devouring Ben's face with her dull black eyes. But when above the loud labor of his breath his bright eyes rested on her, his clawed white fingers tightened their grip in the sheets, and he gasped strongly, as if in terror:

"Get out! Out! Don't want you."

Eliza left the room. As she walked she stumbled a little, as if her feet were numb and dead. Her white face had an ashen tinge, and her dull eyes had grown bright and staring. As the door closed behind her, she leaned against the wall and put one hand across her face. Then, in a moment, she went down to her pots again.

Frantically, angrily, with twitching limbs they demanded calm and steady nerves from one another; they insisted that they keep away from the sick-room—but, as if drawn by some terrible magnet, they found themselves again and again outside the door, listening, on tiptoe, with caught breath, with an insatiate thirst for horror, to the hoarse noise of his gasping as he strove to force air down into his strangled and cemented lungs. And eagerly, jealously, they sought entrance to the room, waiting their turn for carrying water, towels, supplies.

Mrs. Pert, from her refuge in the boarding-house across the street, called Helen on the phone each half-hour, and the girl talked to her while Eliza came from the kitchen into the hall, and stood, hands folded, lips pursed, with eyes that sparkled with her hate.

The girl cried and laughed as she talked.

"Well . . . that's all right, Fatty. . . . You know how I feel about it. . . . I've always said that if he had one true friend in the world, it's you . . . and don't think we're *all* ungrateful for what you've done. . . ."

During the pauses, Eugene could hear the voice of the other woman across the wires, sobbing.

And Eliza said, grimly: "If she calls up again you let me talk to her. I'll fix her!"

"Good heavens, mama!" Helen cried angrily. "You've done enough already. You drove her out of the house when she'd done more for him than all his family put together." Her big strained features worked convulsively. "Why, it's ridiculous!"

Within Eugene, as he paced restlessly up and down the hall or prowled through the house a-search for some entrance he had never found, a bright and stricken thing kept twisting about like a trapped bird. This bright thing, the core of him, his Stranger, kept twisting its head about, unable to look at horror, until at length it gazed steadfastly, as if under a dreadful hypnosis, into the eyes of death and darkness. And his soul plunged downward, drowning in that deep pit: he felt that he could never again escape from this smothering flood of pain and ugliness, from the eclipsing horror and pity of it all. And as he walked, he twisted his own neck about, and beat the air with his arm like a wing, as if he had received a blow in his kidneys. He felt that he might be clean and free if he could only escape into a single burning passion—hard, and hot, and glittering—of love, hatred, terror, or disgust. But he was caught, he was strangling, in the web of futility—there was no moment of hate that was not touched by a dozen shafts of pity: impotently, he wanted to seize them, cuff them, shake them, as one might a trying brat, and at the same time to caress them, love them, comfort them.

As he thought of the dying boy upstairs, the messy ugliness of it—as they stood whimpering by while he strangled—choked him with fury and horror. The old fantasy of his childhood came back to him: he remembered his hatred of the semi-private bathroom, his messy discomfort while he sat at stool and stared at the tub filled with dirty wash, sloppily puffed and ballooned by cold gray soapy water. He thought of this as Ben lay dying.

Their hopes revived strongly in the forenoon when word came to them that the patient's temperature was lower, his pulse stronger, the congestion of the lungs slightly relieved. But at one o'clock, after a fit of coughing, he grew delirious, his temperature mounted, he had increasing difficulty in getting his breath. Eugene and Luke raced to Wood's pharmacy in Hugh Barton's car, for an oxygen tank. When they returned, Ben had almost choked to death.

Quickly they carried the tank into the room, and placed it near his head. Bessie Gant seized the cone, and started to put it over Ben's mouth, commanding him to breathe it in. He fought it away tigerishly: curtly the nurse commanded Eugene to seize his hands.

Eugene gripped Ben's hot wrists: his heart turned rotten. Ben rose wildly from his pillows, wrenching like a child to get his hands free, gasping horribly, his eyes wild with terror:

"No! No! 'Gene! 'Gene! No! No!"

Eugene caved in, releasing him and turning away, white-faced, from the accusing fear of the bright dying eyes. Others held him: he was given temporary relief. Then he became delirious again.

By four o'clock it was apparent that death was near. Ben had brief periods of consciousness, unconsciousness, and delirium —but most of the time he was delirious. His breathing was easier, he hummed snatches of popular songs, some old and forgotten, called up now from the lost and secret adyts of his childhood; but always he returned, in his quiet humming voice, to a popular song of war-time—cheap, sentimental, but now tragically moving: "Just a Baby's Prayer at Twilight,"

". . . when lights are low.
Poor baby's years"

Helen entered the darkening room.

"Are filled with tears."

The fear had gone out of his eyes: above his gasping he looked gravely at her, scowling, with the old puzzled child's stare. Then, in a moment of fluttering consciousness, he recognized her. He grinned beautifully, with the thin swift flicker of his mouth.

"Hello, Helen! It's Helen!" he cried eagerly.

She came from the room with a writhen and contorted face, holding the sobs that shook her until she was half-way down the stairs.

As darkness came upon the gray wet day, the family gathered in the parlor, in the last terrible congress before death, silent, waiting. Gant rocked petulantly, spitting into the fire, making a weak whining moan from time to time. One by one, at intervals, they left the room, mounting the stairs softly, and listening outside the door of the sick-room. And they heard Ben, as, with incessant humming repetition, like a child, he sang his song,

"There's a mother there at twilight
Who's glad to know——"

Eliza sat stolidly, hands folded, before the parlor fire. Her dead white face had a curious carven look; the inflexible solidity of madness.

"Well," she said at length, slowly, "you never know. Perhaps this is the crisis. Perhaps—" her face hardened into granite again. She said no more.

Coker came in and went at once, without speaking, to the sick-room. Shortly before nine o'clock Bessie Gant came down.

"All right," she said quietly. "You had all better come up now. This is the end."

Eliza got up and marched out of the room with a stolid face. Helen followed her: she was panting with hysteria, and had begun to wring her big hands.

"Now, get hold of yourself, Helen," said Bessie Gant warningly. "This is no time to let yourself go."

Eliza went steadily upstairs, making no noise. But, as she neared the room, she paused, as if listening for sounds within. Faintly, in the silence, they heard Ben's song. And suddenly, casting away all pretense, Eliza staggered, and fell against the wall, turning her face into her hand, with a terrible wrenched cry:

"O God! If I had known! If I had known!"

Then, weeping with bitter unrestraint, with the contorted and ugly grimace of sorrow, mother and daughter embraced each other. In a moment they composed themselves, and quietly entered the room.

Eugene and Luke pulled Gant to his feet and supported him up the stairs. He sprawled upon them, moaning in long quivering exhalations.

"Mer-ci-ful God! That I should have to bear this in my old age. That I should——"

"Papa! For God's sake!" Eugene cried sharply. "Pull yourself together! It's Ben who's dying—not us! Let's try to behave decently to him for once."

This served to quiet Gant for a moment. But as he entered the room, and saw Ben lying in the semi-conscious coma that precedes death, the fear of his own death overcame him, and he began to moan again. They seated him in a chair, at the foot of the bed, and he rocked back and forth, weeping:

"O Jesus! I can't bear it! Why must you put this upon me? I'm old and sick, and I don't know where the money's to come from. How are we ever going to face this fearful and croo-el winter? It'll cost a thousand dollars before we're through burying him, and I don't know where the money's to come from." He wept affectedly with sniffling sobs.

"Hush! hush!" cried Helen, rushing at him. In her furious anger, she seized him and shook him. "You damned old man you, I could kill you! How dare you talk like that when your son's dying? I've wasted six years of my life nursing you, and you'll be the last one to go!" In her blazing anger, she turned accusingly on Eliza:

"You've done this to him. You're the one that's responsible. If you hadn't pinched every penny he'd never have been like this. Yes, and Ben would be here, too!" She panted for breath for a moment. Eliza made no answer. She did not hear her.

"After this, I'm through! I've been looking for you to die—and Ben's the one who has to go." Her voice rose to a scream of exasperation. She shook Gant again. "Never again! Do you hear that, you selfish old man? You've had everything—Ben's had nothing. And now he's the one to go. I hate you!"

"Helen! Helen!" said Bessie Gant quietly. "Remember where you are."

"Yes, that means a lot to us," Eugene muttered bitterly.

Then, over the ugly clamor of their dissension, over the rasp and snarl of their nerves, they heard the low mutter of Ben's expiring breath. The light had been re-shaded: he lay, like his own shadow, in all his fierce gray lonely beauty. And as they looked and saw his bright eyes already blurred with death, and saw the feeble beating flutter of his poor thin breast, the strange wonder, the dark rich miracle of his life surged over them its enormous loveliness. They grew quiet and calm, they plunged below all the splintered wreckage of their lives, they drew together in a superb communion of love and valiance, beyond horror and confusion, beyond death.

And Eugene's eyes grew blind with love and wonder: an enormous organ-music sounded in his heart, he possessed them for a moment, he was a part of their loveliness, his life soared magnificently out of the slough of pain and ugliness. He thought:

"That was not all! That really was not all!"

Helen turned quietly to Coker, who was standing in shadow by the window, chewing upon his long unlighted cigar.

"Is there nothing more you can do? Have you tried everything? I mean—*everything?*"

Her voice was prayerful and low. Coker turned toward her slowly, taking the cigar between his big stained fingers. Then, gently, with his weary yellow smile, he answered: "Everything. Not all the king's horses, not all the doctors and nurses in the world, can help him now."

"How long have you known this?" she said.

"For two days," he answered. "From the beginning." He was silent for a moment. "For ten years!" he went on with growing energy. "Since I first saw him, at three in the morning, in the Greasy Spoon, with a doughnut in one hand and a cigarette in the other. My dear, dear girl," he said gently as she tried to speak, "we can't turn back the days that have gone. We can't turn life back to the hours when our lungs were sound, our blood hot, our bodies young. We are a flash of fire—a brain, a heart, a spirit. And we are three-cents-worth of lime and iron—which we cannot get back."

He picked up his greasy black slouch hat, and jammed it carelessly upon his head. Then he fumbled for a match and lit the chewed cigar.

"Has everything been done?" she said again. "I want to know! Is there anything left worth trying?"

He made a weary gesture of his arms.

"My dear girl!" he said. "He's drowning! Drowning!"

She stood frozen with the horror of his pronouncement.

Coker looked for a moment more at the gray twisted shadow on the bed. Then, quietly, sadly, with tenderness and tired wonder, he said: "Old Ben. When shall we see *his* like again?"

Then he went quietly out, the long cigar clamped firmly in his mouth.

In a moment, Bessie Gant, breaking harshly in upon their silence with ugly and triumphant matter-of-factness, said: "Well, it will be a relief to get this over. I'd rather be called into forty outside cases than one in which any of these damn relations are concerned. I'm dead for sleep."

Helen turned quietly upon her.

"Leave the room!" she said. "This is our affair now. We have the right to be left alone."

Surprised, Bessie Gant stared at her for a moment with an angry, resentful face. Then she left the room.

The only sound in the room now was the low rattling mutter of Ben's breath. He no longer gasped; he no longer gave signs of consciousness or struggle. His eyes were almost closed; their gray flicker was dulled, coated with the sheen of insensibility and death. He lay quietly upon his back, very straight, without sign of pain, and with a curious upturned thrust of his sharp thin face. His mouth was firmly shut. Already, save for the feeble mutter of his breath, he seemed to be dead—he seemed detached, no part of the ugly mechanism of that sound which came to remind them of the terrible chemistry of flesh, to mock at illusion, at all belief in the strange passage and continuance of life.

He was dead, save for the slow running down of the worn-out machine, save for that dreadful mutter within him of which he was no part. He was dead.

But in their enormous silence wonder grew. They remembered the strange flitting loneliness of his life, they thought of a thousand forgotten acts and moments—and always there was something that now seemed unearthly and strange: he walked through their lives like a shadow—they looked now upon his gray deserted shell with a thrill of awful recognition, as one who remembers a forgotten and enchanted word, or as men who look upon a corpse and see for the first time a departed god.

Luke, who had been standing at the foot of the bed, now turned to Eugene nervously, stammering in an unreal whisper of wonder and disbelief:

"I g-g-g-guess Ben's gone."

Gant had grown very quiet: he sat in the darkness at the foot of the bed, leaning forward upon his cane, escaped from the revery of his own approaching death, into the waste land of the past, blazing back sadly and poignantly the trail across the lost years that led to the birth of his strange son.

Helen sat facing the bed, in the darkness near the windows. Her eyes rested not on Ben but on her mother's face. All by unspoken consent stood back in the shadows and let Eliza repossess the flesh to which she had given life.

And Eliza, now that he could deny her no longer, now that his fierce bright eyes could no longer turn from her in pain and aversion, sat near his head beside him, clutching his cold hand between her rough worn palms.

She did not seem conscious of the life around her. She seemed under a powerful hypnosis: she sat very stiff and erect in her chair, her white face set stonily, her dull black eyes fixed upon the gray cold face.

They sat waiting. Midnight came. A cock crew. Eugene went quietly to a window and stood looking out. The great beast of night prowled softly about the house. The walls, the windows seemed to bend inward from the thrusting pressure of the dark. The low noise in the wasted body seemed almost to have stopped. It came infrequently, almost inaudibly, with a faint fluttering respiration.

Helen made a sign to Gant and Luke. They rose and went quietly out. At the door she paused, and beckoned to Eugene. He went to her.

"You stay here with her," she said. "You're her youngest. When it's over come and tell us."

He nodded, and closed the door behind her. When they had gone, he waited, listening for a moment. Then he went to where Eliza was sitting. He bent over her.

"Mama!" he whispered. "Mama!"

She gave no sign that she had heard him. Her face did not move; she did not turn her eyes from their fixed stare.

"Mama!" he said more loudly. "Mama!"

He touched her. She made no response.

"Mama! Mama!"

She sat there stiffly and primly like a little child.

Swarming pity rose in him. Gently, desperately, he tried to detach her fingers from Ben's hand. Her rough clasp on the cold hand tightened. Then, slowly, stonily, from right to left, without expression, she shook her head.

He fell back, beaten, weeping, before that implacable gesture. Suddenly, with horror, he saw that she was watching her own death, that the unloosening grip of her hand on Ben's hand was an act of union with her own flesh, that, for her, Ben was not dying—but that a part of *her,* of *her* life, *her* blood, *her* body, was dying. Part of her, the younger, the lovelier, the better part, coined in her flesh, borne and nourished and begun with so much pain there twenty-six years before, and forgotten since, was dying.

Eugene stumbled to the other side of the bed and fell upon his knees. He began to pray. He did not believe in God, nor in Heaven or Hell, but he was afraid they might be true. He did not believe in angels with soft faces and bright wings, but he believed in the dark spirits that hovered above the heads of lonely men. He did not believe in devils or angels, but he believed in Ben's bright demon to whom he had seen him speak so many times.

Eugene did not believe in these things, but he was afraid they might be true. He was afraid that Ben would get lost again. He felt that no one but he could pray for Ben now: that the dark union of their spirits made only *his* prayers valid. All that he had read in books, all the tranquil wisdom he had professed so glibly in his philosophy course, and the great names of Plato and Plotinus, of Spinoza and Immanuel Kant, of Hegel and Descartes, left him now, under the mastering surge of his wild Celtic superstition. He felt that he must pray frantically as long as the little ebbing flicker of breath remained in his brother's body.

So, with insane sing-song repetition, he began to mutter over and over again: "Whoever You Are, be good to Ben to-night. Show him the way . . . Whoever You Are, be good to Ben tonight. Show him the way . . ." He lost count of the minutes, the hours: he heard only the feeble rattle of dying breath, and his wild synchronic prayer.

Light faded from his brain, and consciousness. Fatigue and powerful nervous depletion conquered him. He sprawled out on the floor, with his arms pillowed on the bed, muttering drowsily. Eliza, unmoving, sat across the bed, holding Ben's hand. Eugene, mumbling, sank into an uneasy sleep.

He awoke suddenly, conscious that he had slept, with a sharp quickening of horror. He was afraid that the little fluttering breath had now ceased entirely, that the effect of his prayer was lost. The body on the bed was almost rigid: there was no sound. Then, unevenly, without rhythm, there was a faint mutter of breath. He knew it was the end. He rose quickly and ran to the door. Across the hall, in a cold bedroom, on two wide beds, Gant, Luke, and Helen lay exhausted.

"Come," cried Eugene. "He's going now."

They came quickly into the room. Eliza sat unmoving, oblivious of them. As they entered the room, they heard, like a faint expiring sigh, the final movement of breath.

The rattling in the wasted body, which seemed for hours to have given over to death all of life that is worth saving, had now ceased. The body appeared to grow rigid before them. Slowly, after a moment, Eliza withdrew her hands. But suddenly, marvellously, as if his resurrection and rebirth had come upon him, Ben drew upon the air in a long and powerful respiration; his gray eyes opened. Filled with a terrible vision of all life in the one moment, he seemed to rise forward bodilessly from his pillows without support—a flame, a light, a glory—joined at length in death to the dark spirit who had brooded upon each footstep of his lonely adventure on earth; and, casting the fierce sword of his glance with utter and final comprehension upon the room haunted with its gray pageantry of cheap loves and dull consciences and on all those uncertain mummers of waste and confusion fading now from the bright window of his eyes, he passed instantly, scornful and unafraid, as he had lived, into the shades of death.

We can believe in the nothingness of life, we can believe in the nothingness of death and of life after death—but who can believe in the nothingness of Ben? Like Apollo, who did his penance to the high god in the sad house of King Admetus, he came, a god with broken feet, into the gray hovel of this world. And he lived here a stranger, trying to recapture the music of the lost world, trying to recall the great forgotten language, the lost faces, the stone, the leaf, the door.

O Artemidorus, farewell!

XXXVI

In that enormous silence, where pain and darkness met, some birds were waking. It was October. It was almost four o'clock in the morning. Eliza straightened out Ben's limbs, and folded his hands across his body. She smoothed out the rumpled covers of the bed, and patted out the pillows, making a smooth hollow for his head to rest in. His flashing hair, cropped close to his well-shaped head, was crisp and crinkly as a boy's, and shone with bright points of light. With a pair of scissors, she snipped off a little lock where it would not show.

"Grover's was black as a raven's without a kink in it. You'd never have known they were twins," she said.

They went downstairs to the kitchen.

"Well, Eliza," said Gant, calling her by name for the first time in thirty years, "you've had a hard life. If I'd acted different, we might have got along together. Let's try to make the most of what time's left. Nobody is blaming you. Taking it all in all, you've done pretty well."

"There are a great many things I'd like to do over again," said Eliza gravely. She shook her head. "We never know."

"We'll talk about it some other time," said Helen. "I guess every one is worn out. I know I am. I'm going to get some sleep. Papa, go on to bed, in heaven's name! There's nothing you ca do now. Mama, I think you'd better go, too——"

"No," said Eliza, shaking her head. "You children go on. I couldn't sleep now anyway. There are too many things to do. I'm going to call up John Hines now."

"Tell him," said Gant, "to spare no expense. I'll foot the bills."

"Well," said Helen, "whatever it costs, let's give Ben a good funeral. It's the last thing we can ever do for him. I want to have no regrets on that score."

"Yes," said Eliza, nodding slowly. "I want the best one that money will buy. I'll make arrangements with John Hines when I talk to him. You children go on to bed now."

"Poor old 'Gene," said Helen, laughing. "He looks like the last rose of summer. He's worn out. You pile in and get some sleep, honey."

"No," he said, "I'm hungry. I haven't had anything to eat since I left the university."

"Well, for G-G-G-God's sake!" Luke stuttered. "Why didn't you speak, idiot? I'd have got you something. Come on," he said, grinning. "I wouldn't mind a bite myself. Let's go uptown and eat."

"Yes," said Eugene. "I'd like to get out for a while from the bosom of the family circle."

They laughed crazily. He poked around the stove for a moment, peering into the oven.

"Huh? Hah? What are you after, boy?" said Eliza suspiciously.

"What you got good to eat, Miss Eliza?" he said, leering crazily at her. He looked at the sailor: they burst into loud idiot laughter, pronging each other in the ribs. Eugene picked up a coffee-pot half-filled with a cold weak wash, and sniffed at it.

"By God!" he said. "That's one thing Ben's out of. He won't have to drink mama's coffee any more."

"Whah-whah-whah!" said the sailor.

Gant grinned, wetting a thumb.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Helen, with a hoarse snigger. "Poor old Ben!"

"Why, what's wrong with that coffee?" said Eliza, vexed. "It's *good* coffee."

They howled. Eliza pursed her lips for a moment.

"I don't like that way of talking, boy," she said. Her eyes blurred suddenly. Eugene seized her rough hand and kissed it.

"It's all right, mama!" he said. "It's all right. I didn't mean it!" He put his arms around her. She wept, suddenly and bitterly.

"Nobody ever knew him. He never told us about himself. He was the quiet one. I've lost them both now." Then, drying her eyes, she added:

"You boys go get something to eat. A little walk will do you good. And, say," she added, "why don't you go by *The Citizen* office? They ought to be told. They've been calling up every day to find out about him."

"They thought a lot of that boy," said Gant.

They were tired, but they all felt an enormous relief. For over a day, each had known that death was inevitable, and after the horror of the incessant strangling gasp, this peace, this end of pain touched them all with a profound, a weary joy.

"Well, Ben's gone," said Helen slowly. Her eyes were wet, but she wept quietly now, with gentle grief, with love. "I'm glad it's over. Poor old Ben! I never got to know him until these last few days. He was the best of the lot. Thank God, he's out of it now."

Eugene thought of death now, with love, with joy. Death was like a lovely and tender woman, Ben's friend and lover, who had come to free him, to heal him, to save him from the torture of life.

They stood there together, without speaking, in Eliza's littered kitchen, and their eyes were blind with tears, because they thought of lovely and delicate death, and because they loved one another.

Eugene and Luke went softly up the hall, and out into the dark. Gently, they closed the big front door behind them, and descended the veranda steps. In that enormous silence, birds were waking. It was a little after four o'clock in the morning. Wind pressed the boughs. It was still dark. But above them the thick clouds that had covered the earth for days with a dreary gray blanket had been torn open. Eugene looked up through the deep ragged vault of the sky and saw the proud and splendid stars, bright and unwinking. The withered leaves were shaking.

A cock crew his shrill morning cry of life beginning and awaking. The cock that crew at midnight (thought Eugene) had an elfin ghostly cry. His crow was drugged with sleep and death: it was like a far horn sounding under sea; and it was a warning, to all the men who are about to die, and to the ghosts that must go home.

But the cock that crows at morning, (he thought) has a voice as shrill as any fife. It says, we are done with sleep. We are done with death. O waken, waken into life, says his voice as shrill as any fife. In that enormous silence, birds were waking.

He heard the cock's bright minstrelsy again, and by the river in the dark, the great thunder of flanged wheels, and the long retreating wail of the whistle. And slowly, up the chill deserted street, he heard the heavy ringing clangor of shod hoofs. In that enormous silence, life was waking.

Joy awoke in him, and exultation. They had escaped from the prison of death; they were joined to the bright engine of life again. Life, ruddered life, that would not fail, began its myriad embarkations.

A paper-boy came briskly, with the stiff hobbled limp that Eugene knew so well, down the centre of the street, hurling a blocked paper accurately upon the porch of the Brunswick. As he came opposite Dixieland, he moved in to the curb, tossing his fresh paper with a careful plop. He knew there was sickness in the house.

The withered leaves were shaking.

Eugene jumped to the sidewalk from the sodded yard. He stopped the carrier.

"What's your name, boy?" he said.

"Tyson Smathers," said the boy, turning upon him a steady Scotch-Irish face that was full of life and business.

"My name is 'Gene Gant. Did you ever hear of me?"

"Yes," said Tyson Smathers, "I've heard of you. You had number 7."

"That was a long time ago," said Eugene, pompously, grinning. "I was just a boy."

In that enormous silence, birds were waking.

He thrust his hand into a pocket and found a dollar-bill.

"Here," he said. "I carried the damn things once. Next to my brother Ben, I was the best boy they ever had. Merry Christmas, Tyson."

"It ain't Christmas yet," said Tyson Smathers.

"You're right, Tyson," said Eugene, "but it will be."

Tyson Smathers took the money, with a puzzled, freckled grin. Then he went on down the street, throwing papers.

The maples were thin and sere. Their rotting leaves covered the ground. But the trees were not leafless yet. The leaves were quaking. Some birds began to chatter in the trees. Wind pressed the boughs, the withered leaves were shaking. It was October.

As Luke and Eugene turned up the street toward town, a woman came out of the big brick house across the street, and over the yard toward them. When she got near, they saw she was Mrs. Pert. It was October, but some birds were waking.

"Luke," she said fuzzily. "Luke? Is it Old Luke?"

"Yes," said Luke.

"And 'Gene? Is it old 'Gene?" She laughed gently, patting his hand, peering comically at him with her bleared oaken eyes, and swaying back and forth gravely, with alcoholic dignity. The leaves, the withered leaves, were shaking, quaking. It was October, and the leaves were shaking.

"They ran old Fatty away, 'Gene," she said. "They won't let her come in the house any more. They ran her away because she liked Old Ben. Ben. Old Ben." She swayed gently, vaguely collecting her thought. "Old Ben. How's Old Ben, 'Gene?" she coaxed. "Fatty wants to know."

"I'm m-m-m-mighty sorry, Mrs. P-P-P-Pert . . ." Luke began.

Wind pressed the boughs, the withered leaves were quaking.

"Ben's dead," said Eugene.

She stared at him for a moment, swaying on her feet.

"Fatty liked Ben," she said gently, in a moment. "Fatty and Old Ben were friends."

She turned and stared unsteadily across the street, holding one hand out gravely, for balance.

In that enormous silence, birds were waking. It was October, but some birds were waking.

Then Luke and Eugene walked swiftly townward, filled with great joy because they heard the sounds of life and daybreak.

And as they walked, they spoke often of Ben, with laughter, with old pleasant memory, speaking of him not as of one who had died, but as of a brother who had been gone for years, and was returning home. They spoke of him with triumph and tenderness, as of one who had defeated pain, and had joyously escaped. Eugene's mind groped awkwardly about. It fumbled like a child, with little things.

They were filled with a deep and tranquil affection for each other: they talked without constraint, without affectation, with quiet confidence and knowledge.

"Do you remember," Luke began, "the t-t-t-time he cut the hair of Aunt Pett's orphan boy—Marcus?"

"He—used—a chamber-pot—to trim the edges," Eugene screamed, waking the street with wild laughter.

They walked along hilariously, greeting a few early pedestrians with ironical obsequiousness, jeering pleasantly at the world in brotherly alliance. Then they entered the relaxed and weary offices of the paper which Ben had served so many years, and gave their stick of news to the tired man there.

There was regret, a sense of wonder, in that office where the swift record of so many days had died—a memory that would not die, of something strange and passing.

"Damn! I'm sorry! He was a great boy!" said the men.

As light broke grayly in the empty streets, and the first car rattled up to town, they entered the little beanery where he had spent, in smoke and coffee, so many hours of daybreak.

Eugene looked in and saw them there, assembled as they had been many years before, like the nightmare ratification of a prophecy: McGuire, Coker, the weary counter-man, and, at the lower end, the press-man, Harry Tugman.

Luke and Eugene entered, and sat down at the counter.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said Luke sonorously.

"Hello, Luke," barked McGuire. "Do you think you'll ever have any sense? How are you, son? How's school?" he said to Eugene. He stared at them for a moment, his wet cigarette plastered comically on his full sag lip, his bleared eyes kindly and drunken.

"General, how's the boy? What're you drinking these days—

turpentine or varnish?" said the sailor, tweaking him roughly in his larded ribs. McGuire grunted.

"Is it over, son?" said Coker quietly.

"Yes," said Eugene.

Coker took the long cigar from his mouth and grinned malarially at the boy.

"Feel better, don't you, son?" he said.

"Yes," said Eugene. "A hell of a lot."

"Well, Eugenics," said the sailor briskly, "what are you eating?"

"What's the man got?" said Eugene, staring at the greasy card. "Have you got any young roast whale left?"

"No," said the counter-man. "We did have some, but we run out."

"How about the fricasseed bull?" said Luke. "Have you got any of that?"

"You don't need any one to fricassee your bull, son," said McGuire. "You've got plenty as it is."

Their bull-laughter bellowed in the beanery.

With puckered forehead, Luke stuttered over the menu.

"F-f-f-fried chicken à la Maryland," he muttered. "À la Maryland?" he repeated as if puzzled. "Now, ain't that nice?" he said, looking around with mincing daintiness.

"Bring me one of your this week's steaks," said Eugene, "well done, with a meat-axe and the sausage-grinder."

"What do you want the sausage-grinder for, son?" said Coker.

"That's for the mince pie," said Eugene.

"Make it two," said Luke, "with a coupla cups of Mock-a, just like mother still makes."

He looked crazily around at Eugene, and burst into loud whah-whahs, prodding him in the ribs.

"Where they got you stationed now, Luke?" said Harry Tugman, peering up snoutily from a mug of coffee.

"At the p-p-p-present time in Norfolk at the Navy Base," Luke answered, "m-m-making the world safe for hypocrisy."

"Do you ever get out to sea, son?" said Coker.

"Sure!" said Luke. "A f-f-five-cent ride on the street-car brings me right out to the beach."

"That boy has had the makings of a sailor in him ever since he wet the bed," said McGuire. "I predicted it long ago."

Horse Hines came in briskly, but checked himself when he saw the two young men.

"Look out!" whispered the sailor to Eugene, with a crazy grin. "You're next! He's got his fishy eye glued on you. He's already getting you measured up for one."

Eugene looked angrily around at Horse Hines, muttering. The sailor chortled madly.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said Horse Hines, in an accent of refined sadness. "Boys," he said, coming up to them sorrowfully, "I was mighty sorry to hear of your trouble. I couldn't have thought more of that boy if he'd been my own brother."

"Don't go on, Horse," said McGuire, holding up four fat fingers of protest. "We can see you're heart-broken. If you go on, you may get hysterical with your grief, and break right out laughing. We couldn't bear that, Horse. We're big strong men, but we've had hard lives. I beg of you to spare us, Horse."

Horse Hines did not notice him.

"I've got him over at the place now," he said softly. "I want you boys to come in later in the day to see him. You won't know he's the same person when I'm through."

"God! An improvement over nature," said Coker. "His mother will appreciate it."

"Is this an undertaking shop you're running, Horse," said McGuire, "or a beauty parlor?"

"We know you'll d-d-do your best, Mr. Hines," said the sailor with ready earnest insincerity. "That's the reason the family got you."

"Ain't you goin' to eat the rest of your steak?" said the counter-man to Eugene.

"Steak! Steak! It's not steak!" muttered Eugene. "I know what it is now." He got off the stool and walked over to Coker. "Can you save me? Am I going to die? Do I look sick, Coker?" he said in a hoarse mutter.

"No, son," said Coker. "Not sick—crazy."

Horse Hines took his seat at the other end of the counter. Eugene, leaning upon the greasy marble counter, began to sing:

"Hey, ho, the carrion crow,
Derry, derry, derry, derr—oh!"

"Shut up, you damn fool!" said the sailor in a hoarse whisper, grinning.

"A carrion crow sat on a rock,
Derry, derry, derry, derr—oh!"

Outside, in the young gray light, there was a brisk wakening of life. A street-car curved slowly into the avenue, the motorman leaning from his window and shifting the switch carefully with a long rod, blowing the warm fog of his breath into the chill air. Patrolman Leslie Roberts, sallow and liverish, slouched by anæmically, swinging his club. The negro man-of-all-work for Wood's pharmacy walked briskly into the post-office to collect the morning mail. J. T. Stearns, the railway passenger-agent, waited on the curb across the street for the depot car. He had a red face, and he was reading the morning paper.

"There they go!" Eugene cried suddenly. "As if they didn't know about it!"

"Luke," said Harry Tugman, looking up from his paper, "I was certainly sorry to hear about Ben. He was one fine boy." Then he went back to his sheet.

"By God!" said Eugene. "This is news!"

He burst into a fit of laughter, gasping and uncontrollable, which came from him with savage violence. Horse Hines glanced craftily up at him. Then he went back to his paper.

The two young men left the lunch-room and walked homeward through the brisk morning. Eugene's mind kept fumbling with little things. There was a frosty snap and clatter of life upon the streets, the lean rattle of wheels, the creak of blinds, a cold rose-tint of pearled sky. In the Square, the motormen stood about among their cars, in loud foggy gossip. At Dixieland, there was an air of exhaustion, of nervous depletion. The house slept;

Eliza alone was stirring, but she had a smart fire crackling in the range, and was full of business.

"You children go and sleep now. We've all got work to do later in the day."

Luke and Eugene went into the big dining-room which Eliza had converted into a bed-room.

"D-d-damn if I'm going to sleep upstairs," said the sailor angrily. "Not after this!"

"Pshaw!" said Eliza. "That's only superstition. It wouldn't bother me a bit."

The brothers slept heavily until past noon. Then they went out again to see Horse Hines. They found him with his legs comfortably disposed on the desk of his dark little office, with its odor of weeping ferns, and incense, and old carnations.

He got up quickly as they entered, with a starchy crackle of his hard boiled shirt, and a solemn rustle of his black garments. Then he began to speak to them in a hushed voice, bending forward slightly.

How like Death this man is (thought Eugene). He thought of the awful mysteries of burial—the dark ghoul-ritual, the obscene communion with the dead, touched with some black and foul witch-magic. Where is the can in which they throw the parts? There is a restaurant near here. Then he took the cold phthisic hand, freckled on its back, that the man extended, with a sense of having touched something embalmed. The undertaker's manner had changed since the morning: it had become official, professional. He was the alert marshal of their grief, the efficient master-of-ceremonies. Subtly he made them feel there was an order and decorum in death: a ritual of mourning that must be observed. They were impressed.

"We thought we'd like to s-s-s-see you f-f-f-first, Mr. Hines. about the c-c-c-c-casket," Luke whispered nervously. "We're going to ask your advice. We want you to help us find something appropriate."

Horse Hines nodded with grave approval. Then he led them softly back, into a large dark room with polished waxen floors where, amid a rich dead smell of wood and velvet, upon wheeled trestles, the splendid coffins lay in their proud menace.

"Now," said Horse Hines quietly, "I know the family doesn't want anything cheap."

"No, sir!" said the sailor positively. "We want the b-b-b-best you have."

"I take a personal interest in this funeral," said Horse Hines with gentle emotion. "I have known the Gant and Pentland families for thirty years or more. I have had business dealings with your father for nigh on to twenty years."

"And I w-w-want you to know, Mr. Hines, that the f-f-f-family appreciates the interest you're taking in this," said the sailor very earnestly.

He likes this, Eugene thought. The affection of the world. He must have it.

"Your father," continued Horse Hines, "is one of the oldest and most respected business men in the community. And the Pentland family is one of the wealthiest and most prominent."

Eugene was touched with a moment's glow of pride.

"You don't want anything shoddy," said Horse Hines. "I know that. What you get ought to be in good taste and have dignity. Am I right?"

Luke nodded emphatically.

"That's the way we feel about it, Mr. Hines. We want the best you have. We're not pinching p-p-p-pennies where Ben's concerned," he said proudly.

"Well, then," said Horse Hines, "I'll give you my honest opinion. I could give you this one cheap," he placed his hand upon one of the caskets, "but I don't think it's what you want. Of course," he said, "it's good at the price. It's worth the money. It'll give you service, don't worry. You'll get value out of it——"

Now there's an idea, thought Eugene.

"They're all good, Luke. I haven't got a bad piece of stock in the place. But——"

"We want something b-b-b-better," said Luke earnestly. He turned to Eugene. "Don't you think so, 'Gene?"

"Yes," said Eugene.

"Well," said Horse Hines, "I could sell you this one," he indicated the most sumptuous casket in the room. "They don't come better than that, Luke. That's the top. She's worth every dollar I ask for her."

"All right," said Luke. "You're the judge. If that's the best you've g-g-g-got, we'll take it."

No, no! thought Eugene. You mustn't interrupt. Let him go on.

"But," said Horse Hines relentlessly, "there's no need for you to take that one, either. What you're after, Luke, is dignity and simplicity. Is that right?"

"Yes," said the sailor meekly, "I guess you're right at that, Mr. Hines."

Now we'll have it, thought Eugene. This man takes joy in his work.

"Well, then," said Horse Hines decisively, "I was going to suggest to you boys that you take this one." He put his hand affectionately upon a handsome casket at his side.

"This is neither too plain nor too fancy. It's simple and in good taste. Silver handles, you see—silver plate here for the name. You can't go wrong on this one. It's a good buy. She'll give you value for every dollar you put into it."

They walked around the coffin, staring at it critically.

After a moment, Luke said nervously.

"How—wh—wh—wh-what's the price of this one?"

"That sells for $450," said Horse Hines. "But," he added, after a moment's dark reflection, "I'll tell you what I'll do. Your father and I are old friends. Out of respect for the family, I'll let you have it at cost—$375."

"What do you say, 'Gene?" the sailor asked. "Does it look all right to you?"

Do your Christmas shopping early.

"Yes," said Eugene, "let's take it. I wish there were another color. I don't like black," he added. "Haven't you got any other color?"

Horse Hines stared at him for a moment.

"Black *is* the color," he said.

Then, after a moment's silence, he went on:

"Would you boys care to see the body?"

"Yes," they said.

He led them on tiptoe down the aisle of the coffins, and opened a door to a room behind. It was dark. They entered and stood with caught breath. Horse Hines switched on a light and closed the door.

Ben, clad in his best suit of clothes, a neat one of dark gray-black, lay in rigid tranquillity upon a table. His hands, cold and white, with clean dry nails, withered a little like an old apple, were crossed loosely on his stomach. He had been closely shaved: he was immaculately groomed. The rigid head was thrust sharply upward, with a ghastly counterfeit of a smile: there was a little gum of wax at the nostrils, and a waxen lacing between the cold firm lips. The mouth was tight, somewhat bulging. It looked fuller than it ever had looked before.

There was a faint indefinably cloying odor.

The sailor looked with superstition, nervously, with puckered forehead. Then he whispered to Eugene:

"I g-g-guess that's Ben, all right."

Because, Eugene thought, it is not Ben, and we are lost. He looked at that cold bright carrion, that bungling semblance which had not even the power of a good wax-work to suggest its image. Nothing of Ben could be buried here. In this poor stuffed crow, with its pathetic barbering, and its neat buttons, nothing of the owner had been left. All that was there was the tailoring of Horse Hines, who now stood by, watchfully, hungry for their praise.

No, this is not Ben (Eugene thought). No trace of him is left in this deserted shell. It bears no mark of him. Where has he gone? Is this his bright particular flesh, made in his image, given life by his unique gesture, by his one soul? No, he is gone from that bright flesh. This thing is one with all carrion; it will be mixed with the earth again. Ben? Where? O lost!

The sailor, looking, said:

"That b-b-b-boy sure suffered." Suddenly, turning his face away into his hand, he sobbed briefly and painfully, his confused stammering life drawn out of its sprawl into a moment of hard grief.

Eugene wept, not because he saw Ben there, but because Ben had gone, and because he remembered all the tumult and the pain.

"It is over now," said Horse Hines gently. "He is at peace."

"By God, Mr. Hines," said the sailor earnestly, as he wiped his eyes on his jacket, "that was one g-g-great boy."

Horse Hines looked raptly at the cold strange face.

"A fine boy," he murmured as his fish-eye fell tenderly on his work. "And I have tried to do him justice."

They were silent for a moment, looking.

"You've d-d-done a fine job," said the sailor. "I've got to hand it to you. What do you say, 'Gene?"

"Yes," said Eugene, in a small choking voice. "Yes."

"He's a b-b-b-bit p-p-p-pale, don't you think?" the sailor stammered, barely conscious of what he was saying.

"Just a moment!" said Horse Hines quickly, lifting a finger. Briskly he took a stick of rouge from his pocket, stepped forward, and deftly, swiftly, sketched upon the dead gray cheeks a ghastly rose-hued mockery of life and health.

"There!" he said, with deep satisfaction; and, rouge-stick in hand, head critically cocked, like a painter before his canvas, he stepped back into the terrible staring prison of their horror.

"There are artists, boys, in every profession," Horse Hines continued in a moment, with quiet pride, "and though I do say it myself, Luke, I'm proud of my work on this job. Look at him!" he exclaimed with sudden energy, and a bit of color in his gray face. "Did you ever see anything more natural in your life?"

Eugene turned upon the man a grim and purple stare, noting with pity, with a sort of tenderness, as the dogs of laughter tugged at his straining throat, the earnestness and pride in the long horse-face.

"Look at it!" said Horse Hines again in slow wonder. "I'll never beat that again! Not if I live to be a million! That's art, boys!"

A slow strangling gurgle escaped from Eugene's screwed lips. The sailor looked quickly at him, with a crazy suppressed smile.

"What's the matter?" he said warningly. "Don't, fool!" His grin broke loose.

Eugene staggered across the floor and collapsed upon a chair, roaring with laughter while his long arms flapped helplessly at his sides.

"Scuse!" he gasped. "Don't mean to—A-r-rt! Yes! Yes! That's it!" he screamed, and he beat his knuckles in a crazy tattoo upon the polished floor. He slid gently off the chair, slowly unbuttoning his vest, and with a languid hand loosening his necktie. A faint gurgle came from his weary throat, his head lolled around on the floor languidly, tears coursed down his swollen features.

"What's wrong with you? Are you c-c-c-crazy?" said the sailor, all a-grin.

Horse Hines bent sympathetically and assisted the boy to his feet.

"It's the strain," he said knowingly to the sailor. "The pore fellow has become hysterical."

XXXVII

So, to Ben dead was given more care, more time, more money than had ever been given to Ben living. His burial was a final gesture of irony and futility: an effort to compensate carrion death for the unpaid wage of life—love and mercy. He had a grand funeral. All the Pentlands sent wreaths, and came with their separate clans, bringing along with their hastily assumed funeral manners a smell of recent business. Will Pentland talked with the men about politics, the war, and trade conditions, paring his nails thoughtfully, pursing his lips and nodding in his curiously reflective way, and occasionally punning with a birdy wink. His pleased self-laughter was mixed with Henry's loud guffaw. Pett, older, kinder, gentler than Eugene had ever seen her, moved about with a rustling of gray silk, and a relaxed bitterness. And Jim was there, with his wife, whose name Eugene forgot, and his four bright hefty daughters, whose names he confused, but who had all been to college and done well, and his son, who had been to a Presbyterian college, and had been expelled for advocating free love and socialism while editor of the college paper. Now he played the violin, and loved music, and helped his father with the business: he was an effeminate and mincing young man, but of the breed. And there was Thaddeus Pentland, Will's bookkeeper, the youngest and poorest of the three. He was a man past fifty, with a pleasant red face, brown mustaches, and a gentle placid manner. He was full of puns and pleased good-nature, save when he quoted from Karl Marx and Eugene Debs. He was a Socialist, and had once received eight votes for Congress. He was there with his garrulous wife (whom Helen called Jibber-Jibber) and his two daughters, languid good-looking blondes of twenty and twenty-four.

There they were, in all their glory—that strange rich clan, with its fantastic mixture of success and impracticality, its hard monied sense, its visionary fanaticism. There they were, in their astonishing contradictions: the business man who had no business method, and yet had made his million dollars; the frantic antagonist of Capital who had given the loyal service of a lifetime to the thing he denounced; the wastrel son, with the bull vitality of the athlete, a great laugh, animal charm—no more; the musician son, a college rebel, intelligent, fanatic, with a good head for figures; insane miserliness for oneself, lavish expenditure for one's children.

There they were, each with the familiar marking of the clan—broad nose, full lips, deep flat cheeks, deliberate pursed mouths, flat drawling voices, flat complacent laughter. There they were, with their enormous vitality, their tainted blood, their meaty health, their sanity, their insanity, their humor, their superstition, their meanness, their generosity, their fanatic idealism, their unyielding materialism. There they were, smelling of the earth and Parnassus—that strange clan which met only at weddings or funerals, but which was forever true to itself, indissoluble and forever apart, with its melancholia, its madness, its mirth: more enduring than life, more strong than death.

And as Eugene looked, he felt again the nightmare horror of destiny: he was of them—there was no escape. Their lust, their weakness, their sensuality, their fanaticism, their strength, their rich taint, were rooted in the marrow of his bones.

But Ben, with the thin gray face (he thought) was not a part of them. Their mark was nowhere on him.

And among them, sick and old, leaning upon his cane, moved Gant, the alien, the stranger. He was lost and sorrowful, but sometimes, with a flash of his old rhetoric, he spoke of his grief and the death of his son.

The women filled the house with their moaning. Eliza wept almost constantly; Helen by fits, in loose hysterical collapse. And all the other women wept with gusto, comforting Eliza and her daughter, falling into one another's arms, wailing with keen hunger. And the men stood sadly about, dressed in their good clothes, wondering when it would be over. Ben lay in the parlor, bedded in his expensive coffin. The room was heavy with the incense of the funeral flowers.

Presently the Scotch minister arrived: his decent soul lay above all the loud posturings of grief like a bolt of hard clean wool. He began the service for the dead in a dry nasal voice, remote, monotonous, cold, and passionate.

Then, marshalled by Horse Hines, the pallbearers, young men from the paper and the town, who had known the dead man best, moved slowly out, gripping the coffin-handles with their nicotined fingers. In proper sequence, the mourners followed, lengthening out in closed victorias that exhaled their funeral scent of stale air and old leather.

To Eugene came again the old ghoul fantasy of a corpse and cold pork, the smell of the dead and hamburger steak—the glozed corruption of Christian burial, the obscene pomps, the perfumed carrion. Slightly nauseated, he took his seat with Eliza in the carriage, and tried to think of supper.

The procession moved off briskly to the smooth trotting pull of the velvet rumps. The mourning women peered out of the closed carriages at the gaping town. They wept behind their heavy veils, and looked to see if the town was watching. Behind the world's great mask of grief, the eyes of the mourners shone through with a terrible and indecent hunger, an unnameable lust.

It was raw October weather—gray and wet. The service had been short, as a precaution against the pestilence which was everywhere. The funeral entered the cemetery. It was a pleasant place, on a hill. There was a good view of the town. As the hearse drove up, two men who had been digging the grave, moved off. The women moaned loudly when they saw the raw open ditch.

Slowly the coffin was lowered onto the bands that crossed the grave.

Again Eugene heard the nasal drone of the Presbyterian minister. The boy's mind fumbled at little things. Horse Hines bent ceremoniously, with a starched crackle of shirt, to throw his handful of dirt into the grave. "Ashes to ashes—" He reeled and would have fallen in if Gilbert Gant had not held him. He had been drinking. "I am the resurrection and the life—" Helen wept constantly, harshly and bitterly. "He that believeth in me—" The sobs of the women rose to sharp screams as the coffin slid down upon the bands into the earth.

Then the mourners got back into their carriages and were driven briskly away. There was a fast indecent hurry about their escape. The long barbarism of burial was at an end. As they drove away, Eugene peered back through the little glass in the carriage. The two grave-diggers were already returning to their work. He watched until the first shovel of dirt had been thrown into the grave. He saw the raw new graves, the sere long grasses, noted how quickly the mourning wreaths had wilted. Then he looked at the wet gray sky. He hoped it would not rain that night.

It was over. The carriages split away from the procession. The men dropped off in the town at the newspaper office, the pharmacy, the cigar-store. The women went home. No more. No more.

Night came, the bare swept streets, the gaunt winds. Helen lay before a fire in Hugh Barton's house. She had a bottle of chloroform liniment in her hand. She brooded morbidly into the fire, reliving the death a hundred times, weeping bitterly and becoming calm again.

"When I think of it, I hate her. I shall never forget. And did you hear her? Did you? Already she's begun to pretend how much he loved her. But you can't fool me! I know! He wouldn't have her around. You saw that, didn't you? He kept calling for me. I was the only one he'd let come near him. You know that, don't you?"

"You're the one who always has to be the goat," said Hugh Barton sourly. "I'm getting tired of it. That's what has worn you out. If they don't leave you alone, I'm going to take you away from here."

Then he went back to his charts and pamphlets, frowning importantly over a cigar, and scrawling figures on an old envelope with a stub of pencil gripped between his fingers.

She has him trained, too, Eugene thought.

Then, hearing the sharp whine of the wind, she wept again.

"Poor old Ben," she said. "I can't bear to think of him out there to-night."

She was silent for a moment, staring at the fire.

"After this, I'm through," she said. "They can get along for themselves. Hugh and I have a right to our own lives. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Eugene. I'm merely the chorus, he thought.

"Papa's not going to die," she went on. "I've nursed him like a slave for six years, and he'll be here when I'm gone. Every one was expecting papa to die, but it was Ben who went. You never can tell. After this, I'm through."

Her voice had a note of exasperation in it. They all felt the grim trickery of Death, which had come in by the cellar while they waited at the window.

"Papa has no right to expect it of me!" she burst out resentfully. "He's had his life. He's an old man. We have a right to ours as well as any one. Good heavens! Can't they realize that! I'm married to Hugh Barton! I'm *his* wife!"

Are you? thought Eugene. Are you?

But Eliza sat before the fire at Dixieland with hands folded, reliving a past of tenderness and love that never had been. And as the wind howled in the bleak street, and Eliza wove a thousand fables of that lost and bitter spirit, the bright and stricken thing in the boy twisted about in horror, looking for escape from the house of death. No more! No more! (it said). You are alone now. You are lost. Go find yourself, lost boy, beyond the hills.

This little bright and stricken thing stood up on Eugene's heart and talked into his mouth.

O but I can't go now, said Eugene to it. (Why not? it whispered.) Because her face is so white, and her forehead is so broad and high, with the black hair drawn back from it, and when she sat there at the bed she looked like a little child. I can't go now and leave her here alone. (She is alone, it said, and so are you.) And when she purses up her mouth and stares, so grave and thoughtful, she is like a little child. (You are alone now, it said. You must escape, or you will die.) It is all like death: she fed me at her breast, I slept in the same bed with her, she took me on her trips. All of that is over now, and each time it was like a death. (And like a life, it said to him. Each time that you die, you will be born again. And you will die a hundred times before you become a man.) I can't! I can't! Not now—later, more slowly. (No. Now, it said.) I am afraid. I have nowhere to go. (You must find the place, it said.) I am lost. (You must hunt for yourself, it said.) I am alone. Where are you? (You must find me, it said.)

Then, as the bright thing twisted about in him, Eugene heard the whine of the bleak wind about the house that he must leave, and the voice of Eliza calling up from the past the beautiful lost things that never happened.

"—and I said, 'Why, what on earth, boy, you want to dress up warm around your neck or you'll catch your death of cold.' "

Eugene caught at his throat, and plunged for the door.

"Here, boy! Where are you going?" said Eliza, looking up quickly.

"I've got to go," he said in a choking voice. "I've got to get away from here."

Then he saw the fear in her eyes, and the grave troubled child's stare. He rushed to where she sat and grasped her hand. She held him tightly and laid her face against his arm.

"Don't go yet," she said. "You've all your life ahead of you. Stay with me just a day or two."

"Yes, mama," he said, falling to his knees. "Yes, mama." He hugged her to him frantically. "Yes, mama. God bless you, mama. It's all right, mama. It's all right."

Eliza wept bitterly.

"I'm an old woman," she said, "and one by one I've lost you all. He's dead now, and I never got to know him. O son, don't leave me yet. You're the only one that's left: you were my baby. Don't go! Don't go." She laid her white face against his sleeve.

It is not hard to go (he thought). But when can we forget?

It was October and the leaves were quaking. Dusk was beginning. The sun had gone, the western ranges faded in chill purple mist, but the western sky still burned with ragged bands of orange. It was October.

Eugene walked swiftly along the sinuous paved curves of Rutledge Road. There was a smell of fog and supper in the air: a warm moist blur at window-panes, and the pungent sizzle of cookery. There were mist-far voices, and a smell of burning leaves, and a warm yellow blur of lights.

He turned into an unpaved road by the big wooden sanitarium. He heard the rich kitchen laughter of the negroes, the larded sizzle of food, the dry veranda coughing of the lungers.

He walked briskly along the lumpy road, with a dry scuffling of leaves. The air was a chill dusky pearl: above him a few pale stars were out. The town and the house were behind him. There was a singing in the great hill-pines.

Two women came down the road and passed him. He saw that they were country women. They were dressed rustily in black, and one of them was weeping. He thought of the men who had been laid in the earth that day, and of all the women who wept. Will they come again? he wondered.

When he came to the gate of the cemetery he found it open. He went in quickly and walked swiftly up the winding road that curved around the crest of the hill. The grasses were dry and sere; a wilted wreath of laurel lay upon a grave. As he approached the family plot, his pulse quickened a little. Some one was moving slowly, deliberately, in among the grave-stones. But as he came up he saw that it was Mrs. Pert.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Pert," said Eugene.

"Who is it?" she asked, peering murkily. She came to him with her grave unsteady step.

"It's 'Gene," he said.

"Oh, is it Old 'Gene?" she said. "How are you, 'Gene?"

"Pretty well," he said. He stood awkwardly, chilled, not knowing how to continue. It was getting dark. There were long lonely preludes to winter in the splendid pines, and a whistling of wind in the long grasses. Below them, in the gulch, night had come. There was a negro settlement there—Stumptown, it was called. The rich voices of Africa wailed up to them their jungle dirge.

But in the distance, away on their level and above, on other hills, they saw the town. Slowly, in twinkling nests, the lights of the town went up, and there were frost-far voices, and music, and the laughter of a girl.

"This is a nice place," said Eugene. "You get a nice view of the town from here."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pert. "And Old Ben's got the nicest place of all. You get a better view right here than anywhere else. I've been here before in the daytime." In a moment she went on. "Old Ben will turn into lovely flowers. Roses, I think."

"No," said Eugene, "dandelions—and big flowers with a lot of thorns on them."

She stood looking about fuzzily for a moment, with the blurred gentle smile on her lips.

"It is getting dark, Mrs. Pert," said Eugene hesitantly. "Are you out here alone?"

"Alone? I've got Old 'Gene and Old Ben here, haven't I?" she said.

"Maybe we'd better go back, Mrs. Pert?" he said. "It's going to turn cold to-night. I'll go with you."

"Fatty can go by herself," she said with dignity. "Don't worry, 'Gene. I'll leave you alone."

"That's all right," said Eugene, confused. "We both came for the same reason, I suppose."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pert. "Who'll be coming here this time next year, I wonder? Will Old 'Gene come back then?"

"No," said Eugene. "No, Mrs. Pert. I shall never come here again."

"Nor I, 'Gene," she said. "When do you go back to school?"

"To-morrow," he said.

"Then Fatty will have to say good-bye," she said reproachfully. "I'm going away too."

"Where are you going?" he asked, surprised.

"I'm going to live with my daughter in Tennessee. You didn't know Fatty was a grandmother, did you?" she said, with her soft blurred smile. "I've a little grandson two years old."

"I'm sorry to see you go," Eugene said.

Mrs. Pert was silent a moment, rocking vaguely upon her feet.

"What did they say was wrong with Ben?" she asked.

"He had pneumonia, Mrs. Pert," said Eugene.

"Oh, pneumonia! That's it!" She nodded her head wisely as if satisfied. "My husband's a drug salesman, you know, but I never can remember all the things that people have. Pneumonia."

She was silent again, reflecting.

"And when they shut you up in a box and put you in the ground, the way they did Old Ben, what do they call that?" she asked with a soft inquiring smile.

He did not laugh.

"They call that death, Mrs. Pert."

"Death! Yes, that's it," said Mrs. Pert brightly, nodding her head in agreement. "That's one kind, 'Gene. There are some other kinds, too. Did you know that?" She smiled at him.

"Yes," said Eugene. "I know that, Mrs. Pert."

She stretched out her hands suddenly to him, and clasped his cold fingers. She did not smile any more.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said. "We both knew Ben, didn't we? God bless you."

Then she turned and walked away down the road, at her portly uncertain gait, and was lost in the gathering dark.

The great stars rode proudly up into heaven. And just over him, just over the town, it seemed, there was one so rich and low he could have touched it. Ben's grave had been that day freshly sodded: there was a sharp cold smell of earth there. Eugene thought of Spring, and the poignant and wordless odor of the elvish dandelions that would be there. In the frosty dark, far-faint, there was the departing wail of a whistle.

And suddenly, as he watched the lights wink cheerfully up in the town, their warm message of the hived life of men brought to him a numb hunger for all the words and the faces. He heard the far voices and laughter. And on the distant road a powerful car, bending around the curve, cast over him for a second, over that lonely hill of the dead, its great shaft of light and life. In his numbed mind, which for days now had fumbled curiously with little things, with little things alone, as a child fumbles with blocks or with little things, a light was growing.

His mind gathered itself out of the wreckage of little things: out of all that the world had shown or taught him he could remember now only the great star above the town, and the light that had swung over the hill, and the fresh sod upon Ben's grave, and the wind, and far sounds and music, and Mrs. Pert.

Wind pressed the boughs, the withered leaves were shaking. It was October, but the leaves were shaking. A star was shaking. A light was waking. Wind was quaking. The star was far. The night, the light. The light was bright. A chant, a song, the slow dance of the little things within him. The star over the town, the light over the hill, the sod over Ben, night over all. His mind fumbled with little things. Over us all is something. Star, night, earth, light . . . light . . . O lost! . . . a stone . . . a leaf . . . a door . . . O ghost! . . . a light . . . a song . . . a light . . . a light swings over the hill . . . over us all . . . a star shines over the town . . . over us all . . . a light.

We shall not come again. We never shall come back again. But over us all, over us all, over us all is—something.

Wind pressed the boughs; the withered leaves were shaking. It was October, but some leaves were shaking.

A light swings over the hill. (We shall not come again.) And over the town a star. (Over us all, over us all that shall not come again.) And over the day the dark. But over the darkness—what?

We shall not come again. We never shall come back again.

Over the dawn a lark. (That shall not come again.) And wind and music far. O lost! (It shall not come again.) And over your mouth the earth. O ghost! But, over the darkness—what?

Wind pressed the boughs; the withered leaves were quaking.

We shall not come again. We never shall come back again. It was October, but we never shall come back again.

When will they come again? When will they come again?

The laurel, the lizard, and the stone will come no more. The women weeping at the gate have gone and will not come again. And pain and pride and death will pass, and will not come again. And light and dawn will pass, and the star and the cry of a lark will pass, and will not come again. And we shall pass, and shall not come again.

What things will come again? O Spring, the cruellest and fairest of the seasons, will come again. And the strange and buried men will come again, in flower and leaf the strange and buried men will come again, and death and the dust will never come again, for death and the dust will die. And Ben will come again, he will not die again, in flower and leaf, in wind and music far, he will come back again.

O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again!

It had grown dark. The frosty night blazed with great brilliant stars. The lights in the town shone with sharp radiance. Presently, when he had lain upon the cold earth for some time, Eugene got up and went away toward the town.

Wind pressed the boughs; the withered leaves were shaking.

XXXVIII

THREE weeks after Eugene's return to the university the war ended. The students cursed and took off their uniforms. But they rang the great bronze bell, and built a bonfire on the campus, leaping around it like dervishes.

Life fell back into civilian patterns. The gray back of winter was broken: the Spring came through.

Eugene was a great man on the campus of the little university. He plunged exultantly into the life of the place. He cried out in his throat with his joy: all over the country, life was returning, reviving, awaking. The young men were coming back to the campus. The leaves were out in a tender green blur: the quilled jonquil spouted from the rich black earth, and peach-bloom fell upon the shrill young isles of grass. Everywhere life was returning, awaking, reviving. With victorious joy, Eugene thought of the flowers above Ben's grave.

He was wild with ecstasy because the Spring had beaten death. The grief of Ben sank to a forgotten depth in him. He was charged with the juice of life and motion. He did not walk: he bounded along. He joined everything he had not joined. He made funny speeches in chapel, at smokers, at meetings of all sorts. He edited the paper, he wrote poems and stories—he flung outward without pause or thought.

Sometimes at night he would rush across the country, beside a drunken driver, to Exeter and Sydney, and there seek out the women behind the chained lattices, calling to them in the fresh dawn-dusk of Spring his young goat-cry of desire and hunger.

Lily! Louise! Ruth! Ellen! O mother of love, you cradle of birth and living, whatever your billion names may be, I come, your son, your lover. Stand, Maya, by your opened door, denned in the jungle web of Niggertown.

Sometimes, when he walked softly by, he heard the young men talking in their rooms of Eugene Gant. Eugene Gant was crazy. Eugene Gant was mad. Oh, I (he thought) am Eugene Gant!

Then a voice said: "He didn't change his underwear for six weeks. One of his fraternity brothers told me so." And another: "He takes a bath once a month, whether he needs it or not." They laughed; one said then that he was "brilliant"; they all agreed.

He caught the claw of his hand into his lean throat. They are talking of me, of me! I am Eugene Gant—the conqueror of nations, lord of the earth, the Siva of a thousand beautiful forms.

In nakedness and loneliness of soul he paced along the streets. Nobody said, I know you. Nobody said, I am here. The vast wheel of life, of which he was the hub, spun round.

Most of us think we're hell, thought Eugene. I do. I think I'm hell. Then, in the dark campus path, he heard the young men talking in their rooms, and he gouged at his face bloodily, with a snarl of hate against himself.

I think I am hell, and they say I stink because I have not had a bath. But I could not stink, even if I never had a bath. Only the others stink. My dirtiness is better than their cleanliness. The web of my flesh is finer; my blood is a subtle elixir: the hair of my head, the marrow of my spine, the cunning jointure of my bones, and all the combining jellies, fats, meats, oils, and sinews of my flesh, the spittle of my mouth, the sweat of my skin, is mixed with rarer elements, and is fairer and finer than their gross peasant beef.

There had appeared that year upon the nape of his neck a small tetter of itch, a sign of his kinship with the Pentlands—a token of his kinship with the great malady of life. He tore at the spot with frantic nails; he burned his neck to a peeled blister with carbolic acid—but the spot, as if fed by some ineradicable leprosy in his blood, remained. Sometimes, during cool weather, it almost disappeared; but in warm weather it returned angrily, and he scraped his neck red in an itching torture.

He was afraid to let people walk behind him. He sat, whenever possible, with his back to the wall; he was in agony when he descended a crowded stair, holding his shoulders high so that the collar of his coat might hide the terrible patch. He let his hair grow in a great thick mat, partly to hide his sore, and partly because exposing it to the view of the barber touched him with shame and horror.

He would become at times insanely conscious of spotless youth: he was terrified before the loud good health of America, which is really a sickness, because no man will admit his sores. He shrank back at the memory of his lost heroic fantasies: he thought of Bruce-Eugene, of all his thousand romantic impersonations, and never could he endure himself with an itching tetter upon his flesh. He became morbidly conscious of all his blemishes, real and fancied: for days he would see nothing but people's teeth—he would stare into their mouths when he talked to them, noting the fillings, the extractions, the plates and bridges. He would gaze with envy and fear at the sound ivory grinders of the young men, baring his own, which were regular but somewhat yellowed with smoking, a hundred times a day. He scrubbed at them savagely with a stiff brush until the gums bled; he brooded for hours upon a decaying molar which must one day be extracted, and, wild with despair, he would figure out on paper the age at which he might become toothless.

But if, he thought, I lose only one every two years after I am twenty, I shall still have over fifteen left when I am fifty, since we have thirty-two, including wisdom-teeth. And it will not look so bad, if only I can save the front ones. Then, with his hope in futures, he thought: But by that time perhaps the dentists can give me real ones. He read several dental magazines to see if there was any hope for the transplanting of sound teeth for old ones. Then, with brooding satisfaction, he studied his sensual deeply scalloped mouth with the pouting underlip, noting that even when he smiled he barely revealed his teeth.

He asked the medical students innumerable questions about the treatment or cure of inherited blood maladies, venereal diseases, intestinal and inguinal cancers, and the transferrence of animal glands to men. He went to the movies only to examine the teeth and muscles of the hero; he pored over the toothpaste and collar advertisements in the magazines; he went to the shower-rooms at the gymnasium and stared at the straight toes of the young men, thinking with desperate sick pain of his own bunched and crooked ones. He stood naked before a mirror, looking at his long gaunt body, smooth and white save for the crooked toes and the terrible spot on his neck—lean, but moulded with delicate and powerful symmetry.

Then, slowly, he began to take a terrible joy in his taint. The thing on his neck that could not be gouged or burnt away he identified with a tragic humor of his blood that plunged him downward at times into melancholia and madness. But there was, he saw, a great health in him as well, that could bring him back victoriously from desolation. In his reading of fiction, in the movies, in the collar advertisements, in all his thousand fantasies of Bruce-Eugene, he had never known a hero with crooked toes, a decaying tooth, and a patch of tetter on his neck. Nor had he ever known a heroine, whether among the society women of Chambers and Phillips, or among the great elegants of Meredith and Ouida, who had borne such a blemish. But, in all his fantasies now, he loved a woman with hair of carrot silk and eyes of a faintly weary violet, webbed delicately at the corners. Her teeth were small, white and irregular, and she had one molar edged with gold which was visible when she smiled. She was subtle, and a little weary: a child and a mother, as old and as deep as Asia, and as young as germinal April who returns forever like a girl, a mistress, a parent, and a nurse.

Thus, through the death of his brother, and the sickness that was rooted in his own flesh, Eugene came to know a deeper and darker wisdom than he had ever known before. He began to see that what was subtle and beautiful in human life was touched with a divine pearl-sickness. Health was to be found in the steady stare of the cats and dogs, or in the smooth vacant chops of the peasant. But he looked on the faces of the lords of the earth—and he saw them wasted and devoured by the beautiful disease of thought and passion. In the pages of a thousand books he saw their portraits: Coleridge at twenty-five, with the loose sensual mouth, gaping idiotically, the vast staring eyes, holding in their opium depths the vision of seas haunted by the albatross, the great white forehead—head mixed of Zeus and the village degenerate; the lean worn head of Cæsar, a little thirsty in the flanks; and the dreaming mummy face of Kublai Khan, lit with eyes that flickered with green fires. And he saw the faces of the great Thothmes, and Aspalta and Mycerinus, and all the heads of subtle Egypt—those smooth unwrinkled faces that held the wisdom of 1,200 gods. And the strange wild faces of the Goth, the Frank, the Vandal, that came storming up below the old tired eyes of Rome. And the weary craftiness on the face of the great Jew, Disraeli; the terrible skull-grin of Voltaire; the mad ranting savagery of Ben Jonson's; the dour wild agony of Carlyle's; and the faces of Heine, and Rousseau, and Dante, and Tiglath-Pileser, and Cervantes—these were all faces on which life had fed. They were faces wasted by the vulture, Thought; they were faces seared and hollowed by the flame of Beauty.

And thus, touched with the terrible destiny of his blood, caught in the trap of himself and the Pentlands, with the little flower of sin and darkness on his neck, Eugene escaped forever from the good and the pretty, into a dark land that is forbidden to the sterilized. The creatures of romantic fiction, the vicious doll-faces of the movie women, the brutal idiot regularity of the faces in the advertisements, and the faces of most of the young college-men and women, were stamped in a mould of enamelled vacancy, and became unclean to him.

The national demand for white shiny plumbing, toothpaste, tiled lunch-rooms, hair-cuts, manicured dentistry, horn spectacles, baths, and the insane fear of disease that sent the voters whispering to the druggist after their brutal fumbling lecheries—all of this seemed nasty. Their outer cleanliness became the token of an inner corruption: it was something that glittered and was dry, foul, and rotten at the core. He felt that, no matter what leper's taint he might carry upon his flesh, there was in him a health that was greater than they could ever know—something fierce and cruelly wounded, but alive, that did not shrink away from the terrible sunken river of life; something desperate and merciless that looked steadily on the hidden and unspeakable passions that unify the tragic family of this earth.

Yet, Eugene was no rebel. He had no greater need for rebellion than have most Americans, which is none at all. He was quite content with any system which might give him comfort, security, enough money to do as he liked, and freedom to think, eat, drink, love, read, and write what he chose. And he did not care under what form of government he lived—Republican, Democrat, Tory, Socialist, or Bolshevist—if it could assure him these things. He did not want to reform the world, or to make it a better place to live in: his whole conviction was that the world was full of pleasant places, enchanted places, if he could only go and find them. The life around him was beginning to fetter and annoy him: he wanted to escape from it. He felt sure things would be better elsewhere. He always felt sure things would be better elsewhere.

It was not his quality as a romantic to escape out of life, but into it. He wanted no land of Make-believe: his fantasies found extension in reality, and he saw no reason to doubt that there really were 1,200 gods in Egypt, and that the centaur, the hippogriff, and the winged bull might all be found in their proper places. He believed that there was magic in Byzantium, and genii stoppered up in wizards' bottles. Moreover, since Ben's death, the conviction had grown on him that men do not escape from life because life is dull, but that life escapes from men because men are little. He felt that the passions of the play were greater than the actors. It seemed to him that he had never had a great moment of living in which he had measured up to its fulness. His pain at Ben's death had been greater than he, the love and loss of Laura had left him stricken and bewildered, and when he embraced young girls and women he felt a desperate frustration: he wanted to eat them like cake and to have them, too; to roll them up into a ball; to entomb them in his flesh; to possess them more fully than they may ever be possessed.

Further, it annoyed and wounded him to be considered "queer." He exulted in his popularity among the students, his heart pounded with pride under all the pins and emblems, but he resented being considered an eccentric, and he envied those of his fellows who were elected to office for their solid golden mediocrity. He wanted to obey the laws and to be respected: he believed himself to be a sincerely conventional person—but, some one would see him after midnight, bounding along a campus path, with goat-cries beneath the moon. His suits went baggy, his shirts and drawers got dirty, his shoes wore through—he stuffed them with cardboard strips—his hats grew shapeless and wore through at the creases. But he did not mean to go unkempt—the thought of going for repairs filled him with weary horror. He hated to act—he wanted to brood upon his entrails for fourteen hours a day. At length, goaded, he would lash his great bulk, lulled in the powerful inertia of its visions, into a cursing and violent movement.

He was desperately afraid of people in crowds: at class meetings, or smokers, or at any public gathering, he was nervous and constrained until he began to talk to them, and got them under him. He was always afraid that some one would make a joke about him, and that he would be laughed at. But he was not afraid of any man alone: he felt that he could handle any one if he got him away from his crowd. Remembering his savage fear and hatred of the crowd, with a man alone he would play cruelly, like a cat, snarling gently at him, prowling in on him softly, keeping cocked and silent the terrible tiger's paw of his spirit. All of their starch oozed out of them; they seemed to squeak and twitter, and look round for the door. He would get some loud pompous yokel—the student president of the Y. M. C. A., or the class president—and bear down on him with evil gentle matter-of-factness.

"Don't you think," he would begin with earnest piety, "don't you think that a man should kiss his wife on her belly?"

And he would fasten all the eager innocence of his face into a stare.

"For, after all, the belly is sometimes more beautiful than the mouth, and far cleaner. Or do you believe in the belly-less marriage? I, for one," he went on with proud passion, "do not! I stand for more and better Belly-Kissing. Our wives, our mothers, and our sisters expect it of us. It is an act of reverence to the seat of life. Nay! it is even an act of religious worship. If we could get our prominent business men and all the other right-thinking people interested in it, it would bring about the mightiest revolution ever known in a nation's life. In five years it would do away with divorce and re-establish the prestige of the home. In twenty years it would make our nation the proud centre of civilization and the arts. Don't you think so? Or do you?"

Eugene thought so. It was one of his few Utopias.

Sometimes, when he was in a chafed and bitter temper, he would hear a burst of laughter from a student's room, and he would turn snarling, and curse them, believing they laughed at him. He inherited his father's conviction at times that the world was gathered in an immense conspiracy against him: the air about him was full of mockery and menace, the leaves whispered with treason, in a thousand secret places people were assembled to humiliate, degrade, and betray him. He would spend hours under the terrible imminence of some unknown danger: although he was guilty of nothing but his own nightmare fantasies, he would enter a class, a meeting, a gathering of students, with a cold constricted heart, awaiting exposure, sentence, and ruin, for he knew not what crime. Again, he would be wild, extravagant, and careless, squealing triumphantly in their faces and bounding along possessed with goaty joy, as he saw life dangling like a plum for his taking.

And thus, going along a campus path at night, fulfilled with his dreams of glory, he heard young men talking of him kindly and coarsely, laughing at his antics, and saying he needed a bath and clean underwear. He clawed at his throat as he listened.

I think I'm hell, thought Eugene, and they say I stink because I have not had a bath. Me! Me! Bruce-Eugene, the Scourge of the Greasers, and the greatest fullback Yale ever had! Marshal Gant, the saviour of his country! Ace Gant, the hawk of the sky, the man who brought Richthofen down! Senator Gant, Governor Gant, President Gant, the restorer and uniter of a broken nation, retiring quietly to private life in spite of the weeping protest of one hundred million people, until, like Arthur or Barbarossa, he shall hear again the drums of need and peril.

Jesus-of-Nazareth Gant, mocked, reviled, spat upon, and imprisoned for the sins of others, but nobly silent, preferring death rather than cause pain to the woman he loves. Gant, the

Unknown Soldier, the Martyred President, the slain God of Harvest, the Bringer of Good Crops. Duke Gant of Westmoreland, Viscount Pondicherry, twelfth Lord Runnymede, who hunts for true love, incognito, in Devon and ripe grain, and finds the calico white legs embedded in sweet hay. Yes, George-Gordon-Noel-Byron Gant, carrying the pageant of his bleeding heart through Europe, and Thomas-Chatterton Gant (that bright boy!), and François-Villon Gant, and Ahasuerus Gant, and Mithridates Gant, and Artaxerxes Gant, and Edward-the-Black-Prince Gant; Stilicho Gant, and Jugurtha Gant, and Vercingetorix Gant, and Czar-Ivan-the-Terrible Gant. And Gant, the Olympian Bull; and Heracles Gant; and Gant, the Seductive Swan; and Ashtaroth and Azrael Gant, Proteus Gant, Anubis and Osiris and Mumbo-Jumbo Gant.

But what, said Eugene very slowly into the darkness, if I'm not a Genius? He did not ask himself the question often. He was alone: he spoke aloud, but in a low voice, in order to feel the unreality of his blasphemy. It was a moonless night, full of stars. There was no thunder and no lightning.

Yes, but what, he thought with a livid snarl, but what if anybody else thinks I'm not? Ah, but they'd like to, the swine. They hate me, and are jealous of me because they can't be like me, so they'll belittle me if they can. They'd like to say it, if they dared, just to hurt me. For a moment his face was convulsed with pain and bitterness: he craned his neck, holding his throat with his hand.

Then, as was his custom, when he had burnt his heart out, he began to look nakedly and critically at the question.

Well, he went on very calmly, what if I'm not? Am I going to cut my throat, or eat worms, or swallow arsenic? He shook his head slowly but emphatically. No, he said, I am not. Besides, there are enough geniuses. They have at least one in every high school, and one in the orchestra of every small-town movie. Sometimes Mrs. Von Zeck, the wealthy patroness of the arts, sends a genius or two off to New York to study. So that, he estimated, this broad land of ours has by the census not less than 26,400 geniuses and 83,752 artists, not counting those in business and advertising. For his personal satisfaction, Eugene then muttered over the names of 21 geniuses who wrote poetry, and 37 more who devoted themselves to the drama and the novel. After this, he felt quite relieved.

What, he thought, can I be, besides a genius? I've been one long enough. There must be better things to do.

Over that final hedge, he thought, not death, as I once believed—but new life—and new lands.

Erect, with arm akimbo on his hip, he stood, his domed head turned out toward the light: sixty, subtle and straight of body, deep-browed, with an old glint of hawk-eyes, lean apple-cheeks, a mustache bristle-cropped. That face on which the condor Thought has fed, arched with high subtle malice, sophist glee.

Below, benched in rapt servility, they waited for his first husky word. Eugene looked at the dull earnest faces, lured from the solid pews of Calvinism to the shadowland of metaphysics. And now his mockery will play like lightning around their heads, but they will never see it, nor feel it strike. They will rush forward to wrestle with his shadow, to hear his demon's laughter, to struggle solemnly with their unborn souls.

The clean cuffed hand holds up an abraded stick. Their stare follows obediently along its lustre.

"Mr. Willis?"

White, bewildered, servile, the patient slave's face.

"Yes, sir."

"What have I here?"

"A stick, sir."

"What is a stick?"

"It's—a piece of wood, sir."

A pause. Ironic eyebrows ask their laughter. They snicker smugly for the wolf that will devour them.

"Mr. Willis says a stick is a piece of wood."

Their laughter rattles against the walls. Absurd.

"But a stick *is* a piece of wood," says Mr. Willis.

"So is a tree or a telephone-pole. No, I'm afraid that will not do. Does the class agree with Mr. Willis?"

Their grave pretending faces consider the question.

"A stick is a piece of wood cut off at a certain length."

"Then we agree, Mr. Ransom, that a stick is not simply wood with unlimited extension?"

The stunned peasant's face with its blink of effort.

"I see that Mr. Gant is leaning forward in his seat. There is a light in his face that I have seen there before. Mr. Gant will not sleep of nights, for thinking."

"A stick," said Eugene, "is not only wood but the negation of wood. It is the meeting in Space of Wood and No-Wood. A stick is finite and unextended wood, a fact determined by its own denial."

The old head listens gravely above the ironic intake of their breath. He will bear me out and praise me, for I am measured against this peasant earth. He sees me with the titles of proud office; and he loves victory.

"We have a new name for him, Professor Weldon," said Nick Mabley. "We call him Hegel Gant."

He listened to their shout of laughter; he saw their pleased faces turn back on him. That was meant well. I shall smile—their Great Original, the beloved eccentric, the poet of substantial yokels.

"That's a name he may be worthy of," said Vergil Weldon seriously.

Old Fox, I too can juggle with your phrases so they will never catch me. Over the jungle of their wits our unfoiled minds strike irony and passion. Truth? Reality? The Absolute? The Universal? Wisdom? Experience? Knowledge? The Fact? The Concept? Death—the great negation? Parry and thrust, Volpone! Have we not words? We shall prove anything. But Ben, and the demon-flicker of his smile? Where now?

The Spring comes back. I see the sheep upon the hill. The belled cows come along the road in wreaths of dust, and the wagons creak home below the pale ghost of the moon. But what stirs within the buried heart? Where are the lost words? And who has seen his shadow in the Square?

"And if they had asked you, Mr. Rountree?"

"I'd have told the truth," said Mr. Rountree, removing his glasses.

"But they had built a good big fire, Mr. Rountree."

"That doesn't matter," said Mr. Rountree, putting his glasses on again.

How nobly we can die for truth—in conversation.

"It was a very hot fire, Mr. Rountree. They'd have burned you if you hadn't recanted."

"Ah, I'd have let them burn," said the martyred Rountree through moistening spectacles.

"I think it might be painful," Vergil Weldon suggested. "Even a little blister hurts."

"Who wants to be burned for anything?" said Eugene. "I'd have done what Galileo did—backed out of it."

"So should I," said Vergil Weldon, and their faces arched with gleeful malice over the heavy laughter of the class.

Nevertheless, it moves.

"On one side of the table stood the combined powers of Europe; on the other stood Martin Luther, the son of a blacksmith."

The voice of husky passion, soul-shaken. This they can remember, and put down.

"There, if ever, was a situation to try the strongest soul. But the answer came like a flash. *Ich kann nicht anders*—I can't do otherwise. It was one of the great utterances of history."

That phrase, used now for thirty years, relic of Yale and Harvard: Royce and Münsterberg. In all this jugglery, the Teutons were Weldon's masters, yet mark how thirstily the class lap it up. He will not let them read, lest some one find the rag-quilt of his takings from Zeno to Immanuel Kant. The crazy patchwork of three thousand years, the forced marriage of irreconcilables, the summation of all thought, in his old head. Socrates begat Plato. Plato begat Plotinus. Plotinus begat St. Augustine. . . . Kant begat Hegel. Hegel begat Vergil Weldon. Here we pause. There's no more to beget. An Answer to All Things in Thirty Easy Lessons. How sure they are they've found it!

And to-night they will carry their dull souls into his study, will make unfleshly confessions, will writhe in concocted tortures of the spirit, revealing struggles that they never had.

"It took character to do a thing like that. It took a man who refused to crack under pressure. And that is what I want my boys to do! I want them to succeed! I want them to absorb their negations. I want them to keep as clean as a hound's tooth!"

Eugene winced, and looked around on all the faces set in a resolve to fight desperately for monogamy, party politics, and the will of the greatest number.

And yet the Baptists fear this man! Why? He has taken the whiskers off their God, but for the rest, he has only taught them to vote the ticket.

So here is Hegel in the Cotton Belt!

During these years Eugene would go away from Pulpit Hill, by night and by day, when April was a young green blur, or when the Spring was deep and ripe. But he liked best to go away by night, rushing across a cool Spring countryside full of dew and starlight, under a great beach of the moon ribbed with clouds.

He would go to Exeter or Sydney; sometimes he would go to little towns he had never before visited. He would register at hotels as "Robert Herrick," "John Donne," "George Peele," "William Blake," and "John Milton." No one ever said anything to him about it. The people in those towns had such names. Once he registered at a hotel, in a small Piedmont town, as "Ben Jonson."

The clerk spun the book critically.

"Isn't there an *h* in that name?" he said.

"No," said Eugene. "That's another branch of the family. I have an uncle, Samuel, who spells his name that way."

Sometimes, at hotels of ill-repute, he would register, with dark buried glee, as "Robert Browning," "Alfred Tennyson," and "William Wordsworth."

Once he registered as "Henry W. Longfellow."

"You can't fool me," said the clerk, with a hard grin of disbelief. "That's the name of a writer."

He was devoured by a vast strange hunger for life. At night, he listened to the million-noted ululation of little night things, the great brooding symphony of dark, the ringing of remote churchbells across the country. And his vision widened out in circles over moon-drenched meadows, dreaming woods, mighty rivers going along in darkness, and ten thousand sleeping towns. He believed in the infinite rich variety of all the towns and faces: behind any of a million shabby houses he believed there was strange buried life, subtle and shattered romance, something dark and unknown. At the moment of passing any house, he thought, some one therein might be at the gate of death, lovers might lie twisted in hot embrace, murder might be doing.

He felt a desperate frustration, as if he were being shut out from the rich banquet of life. And against all caution, he determined to break the pattern of custom, and look within. Driven on by this hunger, he would suddenly rush away from Pulpit Hill and, as dusk came on, prowl up and down the quiet streets of towns. Finally, lifted beyond all restraint, he would mount swiftly to a door and ring the bell. Then, to whoever came, reeling against the wall and clutching at his throat, he would say:

"Water! In God's name, water! I am ill!"

Sometimes there were women, seductive and smiling, aware of his trick, but loath to let him go; sometimes women touched with compassion and tenderness. Then, having drunk, he would smile with brave apology into startled and sympathetic faces, murmuring:

"Pardon me. It came on suddenly—one of my attacks. I had no time to go for help. I saw your light."

Then they would ask him where his friends were.

"Friends!" he glanced about wildly and darkly. Then, with a bitter laugh, he said, "Friends! I have none! I am a stranger here."

Then they would ask him what he did.

"I am a Carpenter," he would answer, smiling strangely.

Then they would ask him where he came from.

"Far away. Very far," he would say deeply. "You would not know if I told you."

Then he would rise, looking about him with grandeur and compassion.

"And now I must go!" he would say mysteriously. "I have a long way to go before my journey is done. God bless you all!

I was a stranger and you gave me shelter. The Son of Man was treated not so well."

Sometimes, he would ring bells with an air of timid inquiry, saying:

"Is this number 26? My name is Thomas Chatterton. I am looking for a gentleman by the name of Coleridge—Mr. Samuel T. Coleridge. Does he live here? . . . No? I'm sorry. . . . Yes, 26 is the number I have, I'm sure. . . . Thank you . . . I've made a mistake . . . I'll look it up in the telephone directory."

But what, thought Eugene, if one day, in the million streets of life, I should really find him?

These were the golden years.

XXXIX

Gant and Eliza came to his graduation. He found them lodgings in the town: it was early June—hot, green, fiercely and voluptuously Southern. The campus was a green oven; the old grads went about in greasy pairs; the cool pretty girls, who never sweated, came in to see their young men graduate, and to dance; the mamas and papas were shown about dumbly and shyly.

The college was charming, half-deserted. Most of the students, except the graduating class, had departed. The air was charged with the fresh sensual heat, the deep green shimmer of heavy leafage, a thousand spermy earth and flower-scents. The young men were touched with sadness, with groping excitement, with glory.

On this rich stage, Gant, who had left his charnel-house of death for three days, saw his son Eugene. He came, gathered to life again, out of his grave. He saw his son enthroned in all the florid sentiment of commencement, and the whole of his heart was lifted out of the dust. Upon the lordly sward, shaded by great trees, and ringed by his solemn classmen and their families, Eugene read the Class Poem ("O Mother Of Our Myriad Hopes"). Then Vergil Weldon spoke, high-husky, deep, and solemn-sad; and Living Truth welled in their hearts. It was a Great Utterance. Be true! Be clean! Be good! Be men! Absorb the Negation! The world has need of. Life was never so worth. Never in history had there been. No other class had shown so great a promise as. Among other achievements, the editor of the paper had lifted the moral and intellectual level of the State two inches. The university spirit! Character! Service! Leadership!

Eugene's face grew dark with pride and joy there in the lovely wilderness. He could not speak. There was a glory in the world: life was panting for his embrace.

Eliza and Gant listened attentively to all the songs and speeches. Their son was a great man on the campus. They saw and heard him before his class, on the campus, and at graduation, when his prizes and honors were announced. And his teachers and companions spoke to them about him, and said he would have "a brilliant career." And Eliza and Gant were touched a little by the false golden glow of youth. They believed for a moment that all things were possible.

"Well, son," said Gant, "the rest is up to you now. I believe you're going to make a name for yourself." He laid a great dry hand clumsily upon his son's shoulder, and for a moment Eugene saw in the dead eyes the old dark of umber and unfound desire.

"Hm!" Eliza began, with a tremulous bantering smile, "your head will get turned by all the things they're saying about you." She took his hand in her rough warm grasp. Her eyes grew suddenly wet.

"Well, son," she said gravely. "I want you to go ahead now and try to be Somebody. None of the others ever had your opportunity, and I hope you do something with it. Your papa and I have done the best we could. The rest is up to you."

He took her hand in a moment of wild devotion and kissed it.

"I'll do something," he said. "I will."

They looked shyly at his strange dark face, with all its passionate and naïve ardor, and they felt tenderness and love for his youth and all that was unknown to it. And a great love and pity welled up in him because of their strange and awkward loneliness, and because he felt, through some terrible intuition, that he was already indifferent to the titles and honors they desired for him, and because those which he had come to desire for himself were already beyond the scale of their value. And, before the vision of pity and loss and loneliness, he turned away, clutching his lean hand into his throat.

It was over. Gant, who under the stimulus of his son's graduation had almost regained the vitality of his middle years, relapsed now into whining dotage. The terrible heat came down and smote him. He faced with terror and weariness the long hot trip into the hills again.

"Merciful God!" he whined. "Why did I ever come! O Jesus, how will I ever face that trip again! I can't bear it. I'll die before I get there! It's fearful, it's awful, it's cruel." And he wept weak snuffling sobs.

Eugene took them to Exeter and got them comfortably disposed in a Pullman. He was remaining for a few days to gather his belongings—the clutter of four years, letters, books, old manuscript, worthless rubbish of every description, for he seemed to inherit Eliza's mania for blind accumulation. Extravagant with money, and unable to husband it, he saved everything else even when his spirit grew sick at the stale and dusty weariness of the past.

"Well, son," said Eliza, in the quiet moment before departure. "Have you thought yet of what you're going to do?"

"Yes," said Gant, wetting his thumb, "for you've got to shift for yourself from now on. You've had the best education money can buy. The rest is up to you."

"I'll talk to you in a few days when I see you at home," said Eugene. "I'll tell you about it then."

Mercifully the train began to move: he kissed them quickly and ran down the aisle.

He had nothing to tell them. He was nineteen; he had completed his college course; but he did not know what he was going to do. His father's plan that he should study law and "enter politics" had been forgotten since his sophomore year, when it became apparent that the impulse of his life was not toward law. His family felt obscurely that he was an eccentric—"queer," they called it—and of an impractical or "literary" turn.

Without asking sharply why, they felt the absurdity of clothing this bounding figure, with the wild dark face, in a frock-coat and string tie: he did not exist in business, trade, or law. More vaguely, they classified him as bookish and a dreamer—Eliza referred to him as "a good scholar," which, in fact, he had never been. He had simply performed brilliantly in all things that touched his hunger, and dully, carelessly, and indifferently in all things that did not. No one saw very clearly what he was going to do—he, surely, least of all—but his family, following the tack of his comrades, spoke vaguely and glibly of "a career in journalism." This meant newspaper work. And, however unsatisfactory this may have been, their inevitable question was drugged for the moment by the glitter of success that had surrounded his life at the university.

But Eugene was untroubled by thought of a goal. He was mad with such ecstasy as he had never known. He was a centaur, moon-eyed and wild of mane, torn apart with hunger for the golden world. He became at times almost incapable of coherent speech. While talking with people, he would whinny suddenly into their startled faces, and leap away, his face contorted with an idiot joy. He would hurl himself squealing through the streets and along the paths, touched with the ecstasy of a thousand unspoken desires. The world lay before him for his picking—full of opulent cities, golden vintages, glorious triumphs, lovely women, full of a thousand unmet and magnificent possibilities. Nothing was dull or tarnished. The strange enchanted coasts were unvisited. He was young and he could never die.

He went back to Pulpit Hill for two or three days of delightful loneliness in the deserted college. He prowled through the empty campus at midnight under the great moons of the late rich Spring; he breathed the thousand rich odors of tree and grass and flower, of the opulent and seductive South; and he felt a delicious sadness when he thought of his departure, and saw there in the moon the thousand phantom shapes of the boys he had known who would come no more.

And in the day he went to talk with Vergil Weldon. The old man was charming, confidential, full of wise intimacy, gentle humor. They sat beneath the great trees of his yard and drank iced tea. Eugene was thinking of California, Peru, Asia, Alaska, Europe, Africa, China. But he mentioned Harvard. For him, it was not the name of a university—it was rich magic, wealth, elegance, joy, proud loneliness, rich books and golden browsing; it was an enchanted name like Cairo and Damascus. And he felt somehow that it gave a reason, a goal of profit, to his wild ecstasy.

"Yes," said Vergil Weldon approvingly. "It's the place for you, Mr. Gant. It doesn't matter about the others. They're ready now. But a mind like yours must not be pulled green. You must give it a chance to ripen. There you will find yourself."

And he talked enchantingly about the good free life of the mind, cloistered study, the rich culture of the city, and about the food. "They give you food there that a man can eat, Mr. Gant," he said. "Your mind can do its work on it." Then he spoke of his own student days there, and of the great names of Royce and Everett, and William James.

Eugene looked with passionate devotion at the grand old head, calm, wise and comforting. In a moment of vision, he saw that, for him, here was the last of the heroes, the last of those giants to whom we give the faith of our youth, believing like children that the riddle of our lives may be solved by their quiet judgment. He believed, and no experience, he knew, would ever make him disbelieve, that one of the great lives of his time had unfolded itself quietly in the little college town.

Oh, my old Sophist, he thought. What were all the old philosophies that you borrowed and pranked up to your fancy, to you, who were greater than all? What was the Science of Thinking, to you, who were Thought? What if all your ancient game of metaphysics never touched the dark jungle of my soul? Do you think you have replaced my childhood's God with your Absolute? No, you have only replaced his beard with a mustache, and a glint of demon hawk-eyes. To me, you were above good, above truth, above righteousness. To me, you were the sufficient negation to all your teachings. Whatever you did was, by its doing, right. And now I leave you throned in memory. You will see my dark face burning on your bench no more; the memory of me will grow mixed and broken; new boys will come to win your favor and your praise. But you? Forever fixed, unfading, bright, my lord.

Then, while the old man talked, Eugene leaped suddenly to his feet, and grasped the lean hand tightly in his own.

"Mr. Weldon!" he said. "Mr. Weldon! You are a great man! I shall never forget you!"

Then, turning, he plunged off blindly down the path.

He still loitered, although his baggage had been packed for days. With a desperate pain, he faced departure from that Arcadian wilderness where he had known so much joy. At night he roamed the deserted campus, talking quietly until morning with a handful of students who lingered strangely, as he did, among the ghostly buildings, among the phantoms of lost boys. He could not face a final departure. He said he would return early in autumn for a few days, and at least once a year thereafter.

Then one hot morning, on sudden impulse, he left. As the car that was taking him to Exeter roared down the winding street, under the hot green leafiness of June, he heard, as from the sea-depth of a dream, far-faint, the mellow booming of the campus bell. And suddenly it seemed to him that all the beaten walks were thudding with the footfalls of lost boys, himself among them, running for their class. Then, as he listened, the far bell died away, and the phantom runners thudded into oblivion. Soon the car roared up by Vergil Weldon's house, and as he passed, he saw the old man sitting below his tree.

Eugene stood up in the car and waved his long arm in a gesture of farewell.

"Good-bye," he cried. "Good-bye."

The old man stood up with a quiet salute of parting, slow, calm, eloquently tender.

Then, even while Eugene stood looking back upon the street, the car roared up across the lip of the hill, and drove steeply down into the hot parched countryside below. But as the lost world faded from his sight, Eugene gave a great cry of pain and sadness, for he knew that the elfin door had closed behind him, and that he would never come back again.

He saw the vast rich body of the hills, lush with billowing greenery, ripe-bosomed, dappled by far-floating cloud-shadows. But it was, he knew, the end.

Far-forested, the horn-note wound. He was wild with the hunger for release: the vast champaign of earth stretched out for him its limitless seduction.

It was the end, the end. It was the beginning of the voyage, the quest of new lands.

Gant was dead. Gant was living, death-in-life. In his big back room at Eliza's he waited death, lost and broken in a semi-life of petulant memory. He hung to life by a decayed filament, a corpse lit by infrequent flares of consciousness. The sudden death whose menace they had faced so long that it had lost its meaning, had never come to him. It had come where they had least expected it—to Ben. And the conviction which Eugene had had at Ben's death, more than a year and a half before, was now a materialized certainty. The great wild pattern of the family had been broken forever. The partial discipline that had held them together had been destroyed by the death of their brother: the nightmare of waste and loss had destroyed their hope. With an insane fatalism they had surrendered to the savage chaos of life.

Except for Eliza. She was sixty, sound of body and mind, triumphantly healthy. She still ran Dixieland, but she had given up the boarders for roomers, and most of the duties of management she intrusted to an old maid who lived in the house. Eliza devoted most of her time to real estate.

She had, during the past year, got final control of Gant's property. She had begun to sell it immediately and ruthlessly, over his indifferent mutter of protest. She had sold the old house on Woodson Street for $7,000—a good enough price, she had said, considering the neighborhood. But, stark, bare, and raw, stripped of its girdling vines, annex now to a quack's sanitarium for "nervous diseases," the rich labor of their life was gone. In this, more than in anything else, Eugene saw the final disintegration of his family.

Eliza had also sold a wild tract of mountain farmland for $6,000, fifty acres on the Reynoldsville road foı $15,000, and several smaller pieces. Finally she had sold Gant's shop upon the Square for $25,000 to a syndicate of real estate people who were going to erect on the site the town's first "skyscraper." With this money as capital, she began to "trade," buying, selling, laying down options, in an intricate and bewildering web.

"Dixieland" itself had become enormously valuable. The street which she had foreseen years before had been cut through behind her boundaries: she lacked thirty feet of meeting the golden highway, but she had bought the intervening strip, paying without complaint a stiff price. Since then she had refused, with a puckered smile, an offer of $100,000 for her property.

She was obsessed. She talked real estate unendingly. She spent half her time talking to real estate men; they hovered about the house like flesh-flies. She drove off with them several times a day to look at property. As her land investments grew in amount and number, she became insanely niggardly in personal expenditure. She would fret loudly if a light was kept burning in the house, saying that ruin and poverty faced her. She seldom ate unless the food was given to her; she went about the house holding a cup of weak coffee and a crust of bread. A stingy careless breakfast was the only meal to which Luke and Eugene could look forward with any certainty: with angry guffaw and chortle, they ate, wedged in the little pantry—the dining-room had been turned over to the roomers.

Gant was fed and cared for by Helen. She moved back and forth in ceaseless fret between Eliza's house and Hugh Barton's, in constant rhythms of wild energy and depletion, anger, hysteria, weariness and indifference. She had had no children and, it seemed, would have none. For this reason, she had long periods of brooding morbidity, during which she drugged herself with nibbling potations of patent tonics, medicines with a high alcoholic content, home-made wines, and corn whiskey. Her large eyes grew lustreless and dull, her big mouth had a strain of hysteria about it, she would pluck at her long chin and burst suddenly into tears. She talked restlessly, fretfully, incessantly, wasting and losing herself in a pet of snarled nerves, in endless gossip, incoherent garrulity about the townsfolk, the neighbors, disease, doctors, hospitals, death.

The deliberate calm of Hugh Barton sometimes goaded her to a frenzy. He would sit at night, oblivious of her tirade, gravely chewing his long cigar, absorbed in his charts, or in a late issue of *System* or of *The American Magazine*. This power of losing himself in solitary absorption would madden her. She did not know what she wanted, but his silence before her exasperated indictment of life drove her to frenzy. She would rush at him with a sob of rage, knock the magazine from his hands, and seize his thinning hair in the grip of her long fingers.

"You answer when I speak!" she cried, panting with hysteria. "I'm not going to sit here, night after night, while you sit buried in a story. The idea! The idea!" She burst into tears. "I might as well have married a dummy."

"Well, I'm willing to talk to you," he protested sourly, "but nothing I say to you seems to suit you. What do you want me to say?"

It seemed, indeed, when she was in this temper, that she could not be pleased. She was annoyed and irritable if people agreed carefully with all her utterances; she was annoyed equally by their disagreement and by their silence. A remark about the weather, the most studiously uncontroversial opinion, aroused her annoyance.

Sometimes at night she would weep hysterically upon her pillow, and turn fiercely upon her mate.

"Leave me! Go away! Get out! I hate you!"

He would rise obediently and go downstairs, but before he reached the living-room she would call fearfully after him, asking him to return.

She lavished kisses and abuse on him by turns: the mothering tenderness, in which she was drowning for want of a child, she poured out on a dirty little mongrel dog which had trotted in from the streets one night, half-dead from starvation. He was a snarling little brute with a rough black-and-white pelt, and an ugly lift of teeth for every one but his master and mistress, but he had grown waddling-fat upon choice meats and livers; he slept warmly on a velvet cushion and rode out with them, snarling at passers-by. She smothered the little cur with slaps and kisses, devoured him with baby-talk, and hated any one who disliked his mongrel viciousness. But most of her time, her love, her blazing energy, she gave to the care of her father. Her feeling toward Eliza was more bitter than ever: it was one of constant chaffering irritability, mounting at times to hatred. She would rail against her mother for hours:

"I believe she's gone crazy. Don't you think so? Sometimes I think we ought to get guardians appointed and keep her under custody. Do you know that I buy almost every bite of food that goes into that house? Do you? If it weren't for me, she'd let him die right under her eyes. Don't you know she would? She's got so stingy she won't even buy food for herself. Why, good heavens!" she burst out in strong exasperation. "It's not *my* place to do those things. He's her husband, not mine! Do you think it's right? Do you?" And she would almost weep with rage.

And she would burst out on Eliza, thus: "Mama, in God's name! Are you going to let that poor old man in there die for lack of proper care? Can't you ever get it into your head that papa's a sick man? He's got to have good food and decent treatment."

And Eliza, confused and disturbed, would answer: "Why, child! What on earth do you mean? I took him in a big bowl of vegetable soup myself, for his lunch: he ate it all up without stopping. 'Why, pshaw! Mr. Gant,' I said (just to cheer him up), 'I don't believe there can be much wrong with any one with an appetite like that. Why, say,' I said . . ."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" cried Helen furiously. "Papa's a sick man. Aren't you ever going to understand that? Surely Ben's death should have taught us something," her voice ended in a scream of exasperation.

Gant was a spectre in waxen yellow. His disease, which had thrust out its branches to all parts of his body, gave him an appearance of almost transparent delicacy. His mind was sunken out of life in a dim shadowland: he listened wearily and indifferently to all the brawling clamor around him, crying out and weeping when he felt pain, cold, or hunger, smiling when he was comfortable and at ease. He was taken back to Baltimore two or three times a year now for radium treatments: he had a brief flare of vitality and ease after each visit, but every one knew his relief would be only temporary. His body was a rotten fabric which had thus far miraculously held together.

Meanwhile, Eliza talked incessantly about real estate, bought, sold and traded. About her own ventures she was insanely secretive; she would smile craftily when questioned about them, wink in a knowing fashion, and make a bantering noise in her throat.

"I'm not telling all I know," she said.

This goaded her daughter's bitter curiosity almost past endurance, for, despite her angry mockery, the mania for property had bitten into her and Hugh Barton as well: secretly they respected Eliza's shrewdness and got her advice on property into which he was putting all his surplus earnings. But when Eliza refused to reveal her own investments, the girl would cry out in a baffled hysteria:

"She has no right to do that! Don't you know she hasn't?

It's papa's property just as much as hers, you know. If she should die now, that estate would be in a terrible mess. No one knows what she's done: how much she's bought and sold. I don't think she knows herself. She keeps her notes and papers hidden away in little drawers and boxes."

Her distrust and fear had been so great that, much to Eliza's annoyance, she had persuaded Gant, a year or two before, to make a will: he had left $5,000 to each of his five children, and the remainder of his property and money to his wife. And, as the summer advanced, she again persuaded him to appoint as executors the two people in whose honesty she had the greatest trust: Hugh Barton and Luke Gant.

To Luke, who, since his discharge from the navy, had been salesman, in the mountain district, for electrical farm-lighting plants, she said:

"We're the ones who've always had the interests of the family at heart, and we've had nothing for it. We've been the generous ones, but Eugene and Steve will get it all in the end. 'Gene's had everything: we've had nothing. Now he's talking of going to Harvard. Had you heard about that?"

"His m-m-m-majesty!" said Luke ironically. "Who's going to p-p-p-pay the bills?"

Thus, as the summer waned, over the slow horror of Gant's death was waged this ugly warfare of greed and hatred. Steve came in from Indiana; within four days he was insane from whiskey and veronal. He began to follow Eugene around the house, backing him ominously into corners, seizing him belligerently by the arm, as he breathed upon him his foul yellow stench, and spoke to him with maudlin challenge.

"I've never had your chance. Every one was down on Stevie. If he'd had the chance some folks have, he'd be right up there with the Big Boys now. And at that, he's got more brains than a lot of people I know who've been to college. You get that, don't you?"

He thrust his pustulate face, foul and snarling, close to Eugene's.

"Get away, Steve! Get away!" the boy muttered. He tried to move, but his brother blocked him. "I tell you to get away, you swine!" he screamed suddenly, and he struck the evil face away from him.

Then, as Steve sprawled dazed and witless on the floor, Luke sprang upon him with stammering curse, and, past reason, began to drag him up and down. And Eugene sprang upon Luke to stop him, and all three stammered and cursed and begged and accused, while the roomers huddled at the door, and Eliza wept, calling for help, and Daisy, who was up from the South with her children, wrung her plump hands, moaning "Oh, they'll kill him! They'll kill him. Have mercy on me and my poor little children, I beg of you."

Then the shame, the disgust, the maudlin grievance, the weeping women, the excited men.

"You m-m-m-miserable degenerate!" cried Luke. "You c-c-came home because you thought p-p-p-papa would die and leave you a little money. You d-d-don't deserve a penny!"

"I know what you're trying to do," Steve screamed in an agony of suspicion. "You're all against me! You've framed up on me and you're trying to beat me out of my share."

He was weeping with genuine rage and fear, with the angry suspicion of a beaten child. Eugene looked at him with pity and nausea: he was so foul, whipped, and frightened. Then, with a sense of unreal horror and disbelief, he listened while they bawled out their accusations. This disease of money and greed tainted other people, the people in books, not one's own. They were snarling like curs over one bone—their little shares in the money of an unburied dead man who lay, with low moanings of disease, not thirty feet away.

The family drew off in two camps of hostile watchfulness: Helen and Luke on one side and Daisy and Steve, subdued but stubborn, on the other. Eugene, who had no talent for parties, cruised through sidereal space with momentary anchorings to earth. He loafed along the avenue, and lounged in Wood's; he gossiped with the pharmacy rakes; he courted the summer girls on boarding-house porches; he visited Roy Brock in a high mountain village, and lay with a handsome girl in the forest; he went to South Carolina; he was seduced by a dentist's wife at Dixieland. She was a prim ugly woman of forty-three, who wore glasses and had sparse hair. She was a Daughter of the Confederacy and wore the badge constantly on her starched waists.

He thought of her only as a very chill and respectable woman. He played Casino—the only game he knew—with her and the other boarders, and called her "ma'am." Then one night she took his hand, saying she would show him how to make love to a girl. She tickled the palm, put it around her waist, lifted it to her breast, and plumped over on his shoulder, breathing stertorously through her pinched nostrils and saying "God, boy!" over and over. He plunged around the dark cool streets until three in the morning, wondering what he would do about it. Then he came back to the sleeping house, and crept on shoeless feet into her room. Fear and disgust were immediate. He climbed the hills to ease his tortured spirit and stayed away from the house for hours. But she would follow him down the halls or open her door suddenly on him, clad in a red kimono. She became very ugly and bitter, and accused him of betraying, dishonoring, and deserting her. She said that where she came from—the good old State of South Carolina—a man who treated a woman in such fashion would get a bullet in him. Eugene thought of new lands. He was in an agony of repentance and guilty abasement: he framed a long plea for pardon and included it in his prayers at night, for he still prayed, not from devout belief, but from the superstition of habit and number, muttering a set formula over sixteen times, while he held his breath. Since childhood he had believed in the magical efficacy of certain numbers—on Sunday he would do only the second thing that came into his head and not the first—and this intricate ritual of number and prayer he was a slave to, not to propitiate God, but to fulfil a mysterious harmonic relation with the universe, or to pay worship to the demonic force that brooded over him. He could not sleep of nights until he did this.

Eliza finally grew suspicious of the woman, picked a quarrel with her, and ejected her.

No one said very much to him about going to Harvard. He himself had no very clear reason for going, and only in September, a few days before the beginning of the term, decided to go. He talked about it at intervals during the summer, but, like all his family, he needed the pressure of immediacy to force a decision. He was offered employment on several newspapers in the State, and on the teaching staff of the run-down military academy that topped a pleasant hill two miles from town.

But in his heart he knew he was going to leave. And no one opposed him very much. Helen railed against him at times to Luke, but made only a few indifferent and unfriendly comments to himself about it. Gant moaned wearily, saying: "Let him do as he likes. I can't pay out any more money on his education. If he wants to go, his mother must send him." Eliza pursed her lips thoughtfully, made a bantering noise, and said:

"Hm! Harvard! That's mighty big talk, boy. Where are you going to get the money?"

"I can get it," he said darkly. "People will lend it to me."

"No, son," she said with instant grave caution. "I don't want you to do anything like that. You mustn't start life by accumulating debts."

He was silent, trying to force the terrible sentence through his parched lips.

"Then," he said finally, "why can't I pay my way from my share in papa's estate?"

"Why, child!" said Eliza angrily. "You talk as if we were millionaires. I don't even know that there's going to be any share for anybody. Your papa was persuaded into that against his better judgment," she added fretfully.

Eugene began to beat suddenly against his ribs.

"I want to go!" he said. "I've got to have it now! Now!"

He was mad with a sense of frustration.

"I don't want it when I'm rotten! I want it now! To hell with the real estate! I want none of your dirt! I hate it! Let me go!" he screamed; and in his fury he began to beat his head against the wall.

Eliza pursed her lips for a moment.

"Well," she said, at length. "I'll send you for a year. Then we'll see."

But, two or three days before his departure, Luke, who was taking Gant to Baltimore the next day, thrust a sheet of typed paper into his hand.

"What is it?" he asked, looking at it with sullen suspicion.

"Oh, just a little form Hugh wants you to sign, in case anything should happen. It's a release."

"A release from what?" said Eugene, staring at it.

Then, as his mind picked its way slowly through the glib jargon of the law, he saw that the paper was an acknowledgment that he had already received the sum of five thousand dollars in consideration of college fees and expenses. He lifted his scowling face to his brother. Luke looked at him for a moment, then burst into a crazy whah-whah, digging him in the ribs. Eugene grinned sullenly, and said:

"Give me your pen."

He signed the paper and gave it back to his brother with a feeling of sad triumph.

"Whah-whah! Now you've done it!" said Luke, with witless guffaw.

"Yes," said Eugene, "and you think me a fool for it. But I'd rather be done now than later. That's my release, not yours."

He thought of Hugh Barton's grave foxy face. There was no victory for him there and he knew it. After all, he thought, I have my ticket and the money for my escape in my pocket. Now, I am done with it cleanly. It's a good ending, after all.

When Eliza heard of this occurrence, she protested sharply:

"Why here!" she said. "They've no right to do that. The child's still a minor. Your papa always said he intended to give him his education."

Then, after a thoughtful pause, she said doubtfully: "Well, we'll see, then. I've promised to send him for a year."

In the darkness by the house, Eugene clutched at his throat. He wept for all the lovely people who would not come again.

Eliza stood upon the porch, her hands clasped loosely across her stomach. Eugene was leaving the house and going toward the town. It was the day before his departure; dusk was coming on, the hills were blooming in strange purple dusk. Eliza watched him go.

"Spruce up there, boy!" she called. "Spruce up! Throw your shoulders back!"

In the dusk he knew that she was smiling tremulously at him, pursing her lips. She caught his low mutter of annoyance:

"Why, yes," she said, nodding briskly. "I'd show them! I'd act as if I thought I was Somebody. Son," she said more gravely, with a sudden change from her tremulous banter, "it worries me to see you walk like that. You'll get lung-trouble as sure as you're born if you go all humped over. That's one thing about your papa: he always carried himself as straight as a rod. Of course, he's not as straight now as he used to be—as the fellow says" (she smiled tremulously)—"I reckon we all have a tendency to shrink up a little as we get older. But in his young days there wasn't a straighter man in town."

And then the terrible silence came between them again. He had turned sullenly upon her while she talked. Indecisively she stopped, peered down at him with white pursed face, and in that silence, behind the trivial arras of her talk, he heard the bitter song of all her life.

The marvellous hills were blooming in the dusk. Eliza pursed her lips reflectively a moment, then continued:

"Well, when you get way up there—as the fellow says—in Yankee-dom, you want to look up your Uncle Emerson and all your Boston kin. Your Aunt Lucy took a great liking to you when they were down here—they always said they'd be glad to see any of us if we ever came up—when you're a stranger in a strange land it's mighty good sometimes to have some one you know. And say—when you see your Uncle Emerson, you might just tell him not to be surprised to see me at any time now" (She nodded pertly at him)—"I reckon I can pick right up and light out the same as the next fellow when I get ready—I may just pack up and come—without saying a word to any one—I'm not going to spend all my days slaving away in the kitchen—it don't pay—if I can turn a couple of trades here this Fall, I may start out to see the world like I always intended to—I was talking to Cash Rankin about it the other day—'Why, Mrs. Gant,' he said, 'if I had your head I'd be a rich man in five years—you're the best trader in this town,' he said. 'Don't you talk to me about any more trades,' I said—'when I get rid of what I've got now I'm going to get out of it, and not even listen to any one who says real-estate to me—we can't take any of it with us, Cash,' I said—'there are no pockets in shrouds and we only need six feet of earth to bury us in the end—so I'm going to pull out and begin to enjoy life—as the feller says—before it's too late'—'Well, I don't know that I blame you, Mrs. Gant,' he said—'I reckon you're right—we can't take any of it with us,' he said—'and besides, even if we could, what good would it do us where we're goin'?'—Now here" (she addressed Eugene with sudden change, with the old loose masculine gesture of her hand)—"here's the thing I'm going to do—you know that lot I told you I owned on Sunset Crescent——"

And now the terrible silence came between them once again.

The marvellous hills were blooming in the dusk. We shall not come again. We never shall come back again.

Without speech now they faced each other, without speech they knew each other. In a moment Eliza turned quickly from him and with the queer unsteady steps with which she had gone out from the room where Ben lay dying, she moved toward the door.

He rushed back across the walk and with a single bound took the steps that mounted to the porch. He caught the rough hands that she held clasped across her body, and drew them swiftly, fiercely, to his breast.

"Good-bye," he muttered harshly. "Good-bye! Good-bye, mama!" A wild, strange cry, like that of a beast in pain, was torn from his throat. His eyes were blind with tears; he tried to speak, to get into a word, a phrase, all the pain, the beauty, and the wonder of their lives—every step of that terrible voyage which his incredible memory and intuition took back to the dwelling of her womb. But no word came, no word could come; he kept crying hoarsely again and again, "Good-bye, good-bye."

She understood, she knew all he felt and wanted to say, her small weak eyes were wet as his with tears, her face was twisted in the painful grimace of sorrow, and she kept saying:

"Poor child! Poor child! Poor child!" Then she whispered huskily, faintly: "We must try to love one another."

The terrible and beautiful sentence, the last, the final wisdom that the earth can give, is remembered at the end, is spoken too late, wearily. It stands there, awful and untraduced, above the dusty racket of our lives. No forgetting, no forgiving, no denying, no explaining, no hating.

O mortal and perishing love, born with this flesh and dying with this brain, your memory will haunt the earth forever.

And now the voyage out. Where?

XL

The Square lay under blazing moonlight. The fountain pulsed with a steady breezeless jet: the water fell upon the pool with a punctual slap. No one came into the Square.

The chimes of the bank's clock struck the quarter after three as Eugene entered from the northern edge, by Academy Street.

He came slowly over past the fire department and the City Hall. On Gant's corner, the Square dipped sharply down toward Niggertown, as if it had been bent at the edge.

Eugene saw his father's name, faded, on the old brick in moonlight. On the stone porch of the shop, the angels held their marble posture. They seemed to have frozen, in the moonlight.

Leaning against the iron railing of the porch, above the sidewalk, a man stood smoking. Troubled and a little afraid, Eugene came over. Slowly, he mounted the long wooden steps, looking carefully at the man's face. It was half-obscured in shadow.

"Is there anybody there?" said Eugene.

No one answered.

But, as Eugene reached the top, he saw that the man was Ben.

Ben stared at him a moment without speaking. Although Eugene could not see his face very well under the obscuring shadow of his gray felt hat, he knew that he was scowling.

"Ben?" said Eugene doubtfully, faltering a little on the top step. "Is it you, Ben?"

"Yes," said Ben. In a moment, he added in a surly voice: "Who did you think it was, you little idiot?"

"I wasn't sure," said Eugene somewhat timidly. "I couldn't see your face."

They were silent a moment. Then Eugene, clearing his throat in his embarrassment, said: "I thought you were dead, Ben."

"Ah-h!" said Ben contemptuously, jerking his head sharply upward. "Listen to this, won't you?"

He drew deeply on his cigarette: the spiral fumes coiled out and melted in the moon-bright silence.

"No," he said in a moment, quietly. "No, I am not dead."

Eugene came up on the porch and sat down on a limestone base, up-ended. Ben turned, in a moment, and climbed up on the rail, bending forward comfortably upon his knees.

Eugene fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette, with fingers that were stiff and trembling. He was not frightened: he was speechless with wonder and strong eagerness, and afraid to betray his thoughts to ridicule. He lighted a cigarette. Presently he said, painfully, hesitantly, in apology:

"Ben, are you a ghost?"

Ben did not mock.

"No," he said. "I am not a ghost."

There was silence again, while Eugene sought timorously for words.

"I hope," he began presently, with a small cracked laugh, "I hope, then, this doesn't mean that I'm crazy?"

"Why not?" said Ben, with a swift flickering grin. "Of course you're crazy."

"Then," said Eugene slowly, "I'm imagining all this?"

"In heaven's name!" Ben cried irritably. "How should I know? Imagining all what?"

"What I mean," said Eugene, "is, are we here talking together, or not?"

"Don't ask me," said Ben. "How should I know?"

With a strong rustle of marble and a cold sigh of weariness, the angel nearest Eugene moved her stone foot and lifted her arm to a higher balance. The slender lily stipe shook stiffly in her elegant cold fingers.

"Did you see that?" Eugene cried excitedly.

"Did I see what?" said Ben, annoyed.

"Th-th-that angel there!" Eugene chattered, pointing with a trembling finger. "Did you see it move? It lifted its arm."

"What of it?" Ben asked irritably. "It has a right to, hasn't it? You know," he added with biting sarcasm, "there's no law against an angel lifting its arm if it wants to."

"No, I suppose not," Eugene admitted slowly, after a moment. "Only, I've always heard——"

"Ah! Do you believe all you hear, fool?" Ben cried fiercely.

"Because," he added more calmly, in a moment, drawing on his cigarette, "you're in a bad way if you do."

There was again silence while they smoked. Then Ben said:

"When are you leaving, 'Gene?"

"To-morrow," Eugene answered.

"Do you know why you are going, or are you just taking a ride on the train?"

"I know! Of course—I know why I'm going!" Eugene said angrily, confused. He stopped abruptly, bewildered, chastened. Ben continued to scowl at him. Then, quietly, with humility, Eugene said:

"No, Ben. I don't know why I'm going. Perhaps you're right. Perhaps I just want a ride on the train."

"When are you coming back, 'Gene?" said Ben.

"Why—at the end of the year, I think," Eugene answered.

"No," said Ben, "you're not."

"What do you mean, Ben?" Eugene said, troubled.

"You're not coming back, 'Gene," said Ben softly. "Do you know that?"

There was a pause.

"Yes," said Eugene, "I know it."

"Why aren't you coming back?" said Ben.

Eugene caught fiercely at the neckband of his shirt with a clawed hand.

"I want to go! Do you hear!" he cried.

"Yes," said Ben. "So did I. Why do you want to go?"

"There's nothing here for me," Eugene muttered.

"How long have you felt like this?" said Ben.

"Always," said Eugene. "As long as I can remember. But I didn't know about it until you—" He stopped.

"Until I what?" said Ben.

There was a pause.

"You are dead, Ben," Eugene muttered. "You must be dead. I saw you die, Ben." His voice rose sharply. "I tell you, I saw you die. Don't you remember? The front room upstairs that the dentist's wife has now? Don't you remember, Ben? Coker, Helen, Bessie Gant who nursed you, Mrs. Pert? The oxygen tank? I tried to hold your hands together when they gave it to you." His voice rose to a scream. "Don't you remember? I tell you, you are dead, Ben."

"Fool," said Ben fiercely. "I am not dead."

There was a silence.

"Then," said Eugene very slowly, "which of us is the ghost, I wonder?"

Ben did not answer.

"Is this the Square, Ben? Is it you I'm talking to? Am I really here or not? And is this moonlight in the Square? Has all this happened?"

"How should I know?" said Ben again.

Within Gant's shop there was the ponderous tread of marble feet. Eugene leaped up and peered through the broad sheet of Jannadeau's dirty window. Upon his desk the strewn vitals of a watch winked with a thousand tiny points of bluish light. And beyond the jeweller's fenced space, where moonlight streamed into the ware-room through the tall side-window, the angels were walking to and fro like huge wound dolls of stone. The long cold pleats of their raiment rang with brittle clangor; their full decent breasts wagged in stony rhythms, and through the moonlight, with clashing wings the marble cherubim flew round and round. With cold ewe-bleatings the carved lambs grazed stiffly across the moon-drenched aisle.

"Do you see it?" cried Eugene. "Do you see it, Ben?"

"Yes," said Ben. "What about it? They have a right to, haven't they?"

"Not here! Not here!" said Eugene passionately. "It's not right, here! My God, this is the Square! There's the fountain! There's the City Hall! There's the Greek's lunch-room."

The bank-chimes struck the half hour.

"And there's the bank!" he cried.

"That makes no difference," said Ben.

"Yes," said Eugene, "it does!"

I am thy father's spirit, doomed for a certain term to walk the night——

"But not here! Not here, Ben!" said Eugene.

"Where?" said Ben wearily.

"In Babylon! In Thebes! In all the other places. But not here!" Eugene answered with growing passion. "There is a place where all things happen! But not here, Ben!"

My gods, with bird-cries in the sun, hang in the sky.

"Not here, Ben! It is not right!" Eugene said again.

The manifold gods of Babylon. Then, for a moment, Eugene stared at the dark figure on the rail, muttering in protest and disbelief: "Ghost! Ghost!"

"Fool," said Ben again, "I tell you I am not a ghost."

"Then, what are you?" said Eugene with strong excitement. "You are dead, Ben."

In a moment, more quietly, he added: "Or do men die?"

"How should I know," said Ben.

"They say papa is dying. Did you know that, Ben?" Eugene asked.

"Yes," said Ben.

"They have bought his shop. They are going to tear it down and put up a skyscraper here."

"Yes," said Ben, "I know it."

We shall not come again. We never shall come back again.

"Everything is going. Everything changes and passes away. To-morrow I shall be gone and this—" he stopped.

"This—what?" said Ben.

"This will be gone or— O God! Did all this happen?" cried Eugene.

"How should I know, fool?" cried Ben angrily.

"What happens, Ben? What really happens?" said Eugene. "Can you remember some of the same things that I do? I have forgotten the old faces. Where are they, Ben? What were their names? I forget the names of people I knew for years. I get their faces mixed. I get their heads stuck on other people's bodies. I think one man has said what another said. And I forget—forget. There is something I have lost and have forgotten. I can't remember, Ben."

"What do you want to remember?" said Ben.

A stone, a leaf, an unfound door. And the forgotten faces.

"I have forgotten names. I have forgotten faces. And I remember little things," said Eugene. "I remember the fly I swallowed on the peach, and the little boys on tricycles at Saint

Louis, and the mole on Grover's neck, and the Lackawanna freight-car, number 16356, on a siding near Gulfport. Once, in Norfolk, an Australian soldier on his way to France asked me the way to a ship; I remember that man's face."

He stared for an answer into the shadow of Ben's face, and then he turned his moon-bright eyes upon the Square.

And for a moment all the silver space was printed with the thousand forms of himself and Ben. There, by the corner in from Academy Street, Eugene watched his own approach; there, by the City Hall, he strode with lifted knees; there, by the curb upon the step, he stood, peopling the night with the great lost legion of himself—the thousand forms that came, that passed, that wove and shifted in unending change, and that remained unchanging Him.

And through the Square, unwoven from lost time, the fierce bright horde of Ben spun in and out its deathless loom. Ben, in a thousand moments, walked the Square: Ben of the lost years, the forgotten days, the unremembered hours; prowled by the moonlit façades; vanished, returned, left and rejoined himself, was one and many—deathless Ben in search of the lost dead lusts, the finished enterprise, the unfound door—unchanging Ben multiplying himself in form, by all the brick façades entering and coming out.

And as Eugene watched the army of himself and Ben, which were not ghosts, and which were lost, he saw himself—his son, his boy, his lost and virgin flesh—come over past the fountain, leaning against the loaded canvas bag, and walking down with rapid crippled stride past Gant's toward Niggertown in young pre-natal dawn. And as he passed the porch where he sat watching, he saw the lost child-face below the lumpy ragged cap, drugged in the magic of unheard music, listening for the far-forested horn-note, the speechless almost captured pass-word. The fast boy-hands folded the fresh sheets, but the fabulous lost face went by, steeped in its incantations.

Eugene leaped to the railing.

"You! You! My son! My child! Come back! Come back!"

His voice strangled in his throat: the boy had gone, leaving the memory of his bewitched and listening face turned to the hidden world. O lost!

And now the Square was thronging with their lost bright shapes, and all the minutes of lost time collected and stood still. Then, shot from them with projectile speed, the Square shrank down the rails of destiny, and was vanished with all things done, with all forgotten shapes of himself and Ben.

And in his vision he saw the fabulous lost cities, buried in the drifted silt of the earth—Thebes, the seven-gated, and all the temples of the Daulian and Phocian lands, and all Oenotria to the Tyrrhene gulf. Sunk in the burial-urn of earth he saw the vanished cultures: the strange sourceless glory of the Incas, the fragments of lost epics upon a broken shard of Gnossic pottery, the buried tombs of the Memphian kings, and imperial dust, wound all about with gold and rotting linen, dead with their thousand bestial gods, their mute unwakened *ushabtii,* in their finished eternities.

He saw the billion living of the earth, the thousand billion dead: seas were withered, deserts flooded, mountains drowned; and gods and demons came out of the South, and ruled above the little rocket-flare of centuries, and sank—came to their Northern Lights of death, the muttering death-flared dusk of the completed gods.

But, amid the fumbling march of races to extinction, the giant rhythms of the earth remained. The seasons passed in their majestic processionals, and germinal Spring returned forever on the land—new crops, new men, new harvests, and new gods.

And then the voyages, the search for the happy land. In his moment of terrible vision he saw, in the tortuous ways of a thousand alien places, his foiled quest of himself. And his haunted face was possessed of that obscure and passionate hunger that had woven its shuttle across the seas, that had hung its weft among the Dutch in Pennsylvania, that had darkened his father's eyes to impalpable desire for wrought stone and the head of an angel. Hill-haunted, whose vision of the earth was mountain-walled, he saw the golden cities sicken in his eye, the opulent dark splendors turn to dingy gray. His brain was sick with the million books, his eyes with the million pictures, his body sickened on a hundred princely wines.

And rising from his vision, he cried: "I am not there among the cities. I have sought down a million streets, until the goat-cry died within my throat, and I have found no city where I was, no door where I had entered, no place where I had stood."

Then, from the edges of moon-bright silence, Ben replied: "Fool, why do you look in the streets?"

Then Eugene said: "I have eaten and drunk the earth, I have been lost and beaten, and I will go no more."

"Fool," said Ben, "what do you want to find?"

"Myself, and an end to hunger, and the happy land," he answered. "For I believe in harbors at the end. O Ben, brother, and ghost, and stranger, you who could never speak, give me an answer now!"

Then, as he thought, Ben said: "There is no happy land. There is no end to hunger."

"And a stone a leaf, a door? Ben?" Spoke, continued without speaking, to speak. "Who are, who never were, Ben, the seeming of my brain, as I of yours, my ghost, my stranger, who died, who never lived, as I? But if, lost seeming of my dreaming brain, you have what I have not—an answer?"

Silence spoke. ("I cannot speak of voyages. I belong here. I never got away," said Ben.)

"Then I of yours the seeming, Ben? Your flesh is dead and buried in these hills: my unimprisoned soul haunts through the million streets of life, living its spectral nightmare of hunger and desire. Where, Ben? Where is the world?"

"Nowhere," Ben said. " "*You* are your world."

Inevitable catharsis by the threads of chaos. Unswerving punctuality of chance. Apexical summation, from the billion deaths of possibility, of things done.

"I shall save one land unvisited," said Eugene. *Et ego in Arcadia.*

And as he spoke, he saw that he had left the million bones of cities, the skein of streets. He was alone with Ben, and their feet were planted on darkness, their faces were lit with the cold high terror of the stars.

On the brink of the dark he stood, with only the dream of the cities, the million books, the spectral images of the people he had loved, who had loved him, whom he had known and lost. They will not come again. They never will come back again.

With his feet upon the cliff of darkness, he looked and saw the lights of no cities. It was, he thought, the strong good medicine of death.

"Is this the end?" he said. "Have I eaten life and have not found him? Then I will voyage no more."

"Fool," said Ben, "*this* is life. You have been nowhere."

"But in the cities?"

"There are none. There is one voyage, the first, the last, the only one."

"On coasts more strange than Cipango, in a place more far than Fez, I shall hunt him, the ghost and haunter of myself. I have lost the blood that fed me; I have died the hundred deaths that lead to life. By the slow thunder of the drums, the flare of dying cities, I have come to this dark place. And this is the true voyage, the good one, the best. And now prepare, my soul, for the beginning hunt. I will plumb seas stranger than those haunted by the Albatross."

He stood naked and alone in darkness, far from the lost world of the streets and faces; he stood upon the ramparts of his soul, before the lost land of himself; heard inland murmurs of lost seas, the far interior music of the horns. The last voyage, the longest, the best.

"O sudden and impalpable faun, lost in the thickets of myself, I will hunt you down until you cease to haunt my eyes with hunger. I heard your foot-falls in the desert, I saw your shadow in old buried cities, I heard your laughter running down a million streets, but I did not find you there. And no leaf hangs for me in the forest; I shall lift no stone upon the hills; I shall find no door in any city. But in the city of myself, upon the continent of my soul, I shall find the forgotten language, the lost world, a door where I may enter, and music strange as any ever sounded; I shall haunt you, ghost, along the labyrinthine ways until——until? O Ben, my ghost, an answer?"

But as he spoke, the phantom years scrolled up their vision, and only the eyes of Ben burned terribly in darkness, without an answer.

And day came, and the song of waking birds, and the Square, bathed in the young pearl light of morning. And a wind stirred lightly in the Square, and, as he looked, Ben, like a fume of smoke, was melted into dawn.

And the angels on Gant's porch were frozen in hard marble silence, and at a distance life awoke, and there was a rattle of lean wheels, a slow clangor of shod hoofs. And he heard the whistle wail along the river.

Yet, as he stood for the last time by the angels of his father's porch, it seemed as if the Square already were far and lost; or, I should say, he was like a man who stands upon a hill above the town he has left, yet does not say "The town is near," but turns his eyes upon the distant soaring ranges.

THE END.

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